



# Sprains and Strains

## Introduction

**Sprains and Strains** are a common musculoskeletal injury.

Virtually any part of your body can be sprained or strained from an accident, sporting injury or even from doing a job around the home.

A **sprain** is a stretch or tear to a ligament - the tissue that connects bones together. Sprains occur as a result of abnormal forces applied to a joint. **Symptoms** of a sprain can include pain, swelling, bruising and restriction of movement in the affected area.



A **strain** is a twist, pull or tear of a muscle or tendon (the tough, narrow tissue at the end of a muscle that connects it to the bone). It is caused by overstretching or over-contracting a muscle. **Symptoms** of a strain can include pain, muscle spasm and weakness in the muscle. Strains are common injuries in many sports, particularly those that involve running and jumping.

**Signs** that may suggest a more **severe** injury include:

- Severe pain which does not subside
- Immediate and profuse swelling
- Deformity – the injured part of your body may look misshapen
- Extreme loss of function i.e. you are unable to put any weight on your leg.
- Noises (grating or cracking) at injury site

If you feel your injury is severe you may need to attend a minor injury unit (MIU) or emergency department. If you feel your injury is not improving after 5-7 days, or is worsening, you should talk to your GP to discuss management.

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### Medication for Sprains and Strains

- **Medication may not be needed** if the sprain is mild.
- **Painkillers** such as paracetamol are useful to ease pain
- Non-steroidal anti-inflammatories (such as ibuprofen) are not recommended for the first 48 hours after injury, but can be used after this to help control pain.

### Early management

Sprains and Strains can usually be managed at home with **PRICE**. This stands for:

- **Protection** – this depends on the severity of the injury. You may need to use crutches if you are struggling to walk.
- **Rest** - two days (48 hours) of rest is usually recommended. After 2 days it is recommended that gentle movements should start but this time may be longer for a more severe injury.
- **Ice** – this should be applied to the area as soon as possible after injury to help manage swelling and pain . It should be applied for up to 20 minutes every 2 hours. The ice must not touch the skin directly as this may cause a cold burn, so place a damp towel over the injured part first. Frozen peas wrapped in a damp tea towel can be used. Do **not** use ice if you are diabetic or over areas of skin that are in poor condition or with poor sensation. Do **not** use ice packs on the left shoulder if you have a heart condition. Do **not** use ice packs around the front or side of the neck.
- **Compression** – simple tubular bandage can be used to limit swelling and protect the injured limb.
- **Elevation** – try to raise the injured area to an elevated but comfortable height in the first 72 hours especially at night.

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Avoid **HARM**. For the first 72 hours avoid;

- **Heat** e.g. hot baths and heat packs
- **Alcohol** increases bleeding and swelling and decreases healing
- **Running** (or other exercise) may cause further damage
- **Massage** may increase bleeding and swelling

**After 48-72 hours**

**Movement should replace rest.** Gently get the joint moving again by doing gentle exercises several times a day. The aim is to get the joint moving normally and prevent stiffness. Don't do anything that causes too much pain.

You should **not** play sport or do vigorous exercise involving the sprained joint for 3-4 weeks after an injury. The time to return to these activities may be longer depending on the extent of your injury.

**Outcome**

Symptoms will gradually settle usually over the first few days. However, the pain may take several weeks to go completely, especially when you use the injured joint. Symptoms will generally resolve within 4-6 weeks. If you are not improving in this time, or are concerned about your progress, please seek further advice from your triage nurse or GP who may decide that a referral to a physiotherapist is required.

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### **Further information**

Below are the telephone numbers for the Community Outpatient Physiotherapy departments. Please call your local department for any further information/guidance;

Chippenham - 01249 456451

Devizes - 01380 732520

Malmesbury - 01666 827583

Melksham - 01225 701027

Salisbury - 01722 336262 Ext 4425

Savernake - 01672 517310

Trowbridge – 01225 711341

Warminster – 01985 224716

### **Useful websites;**

<http://wiltshirehealthandcare.nhs.uk/service/outpatient-physiotherapy/>

<http://www.nhs.uk/conditions/sprains/Pages/Introduction.aspx>

<https://cks.nice.org.uk/sprains-and-strains>

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### Safeguarding

Wiltshire Health and Care have a strong commitment to care that is safe, of a high quality and that upholds our patients' rights. All our patients have the right to live lives free from abuse or neglect and, where they are able, to make or be supported to make informed decisions and choices about their treatment, care and support. Where patients are not able to make their own decisions, Wiltshire Health and Care staff are committed to ensuring that treatment, care and support is undertaken in accordance with the person's best interests. In order to fulfil these commitments, Wiltshire Health and Care follow the Safeguarding principles and responsibilities laid out in sections 42-46 of the Care Act (2014) and are informed by, and apply, the guiding principles and provisions of the Mental Capacity Act (2005). If you or your carer have any concerns about abuse, neglect or your rights in relation to care provided by Wiltshire Health and Care or any other agency or individual, please raise this directly with any Wiltshire Health and Care staff or contact the Safeguarding Adults Team by telephone on: 0300 4560111.

### Wiltshire Health and Care Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS)

If you have any questions, or concerns, suggestions or compliments about our service, please speak to a member of staff.

This information sheet is available in other languages and formats. If you would like a copy, please contact us on 0300 1237797 and [PALS.wiltshirehealthandcare@nhs.net](mailto:PALS.wiltshirehealthandcare@nhs.net)

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