

Ongoing Management of Upper Limb Sprains and Strains



Patient Information

Returning to normal activity after an injury will vary depending on the severity of the injury. Sprains of ligaments, and strains of muscle tissues normally take 6 – 12 weeks to heal. You should follow the below advice using the acronym **LOVE**¹ to aid healing and recovery.

Loading - As soon as the pain allows, it is important to put your weight through the affected limb, as this will help the healing tissues to become stronger. This includes trying to use your arm for normal activities such as light lifting and pushing. In the first few weeks try to avoid strenuous, heavy lifting, and contact sports.

Optimism – Remember that sprains and strains are a very common injury and given the right management you will get back to normal activities and sports. Recovery from sprains and strains should always include exercises.

Vascularisation – to vascularise means to supply blood to a tissue or structure. Increased blood flow to your affected limb will help to improve tissue healing. You can achieve this by participating in gentle aerobic exercise, such as swimming, using an exercise bike or cross trainer, and walking. Again, this should be within your limits of pain, some pain is acceptable, but sharp pains should be avoided.

Exercise – Below are some exercises you can try to help with your recovery and return to normal activity and sports. You may notice that after you have exercised that your affected joint becomes more swollen, this is very common. You may want to elevate the limb and apply ice to the limb to help with the swelling. Remember when elevating a limb, you need the limb to be higher than the heart. Ice should be applied for no longer 10-15 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

¹ <https://bjsm.bmj.com/content/54/2/72>

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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. Do not fall asleep with the ice pack in place as this can lead to ice burns.

Things to look out for:

If you notice any of the below signs and symptoms on the affected limb, please seek urgent review by calling 111 or attending your local MIU/A+E.

- Constant pain, increased swelling or redness tracking up the limb, and the skin becomes hot to touch
- Feeling unwell, night sweats and/or fevers
- The limb becomes numb, pins and needles, blue colour to the skin and very cold to touch.
- Worsening pain despite rest, elevation, ice, and simple pain relief.

Exercises for the Upper Limb

Try to complete these exercises 1-2 times per day, between 5-15 repetitions of each exercise. Pain should guide how many exercises you can complete. It is acceptable to have some pain, but avoid any sharp pains, or pain exceeding 4/10 on a pain scale where 0 is no pain and 10 is extreme pain.

<p>Grip Squeeze</p> <p>Using a stress ball, or a rolled-up pair of socks, wrap your hand around the ball and gently squeeze. Hold for 2-3 seconds, then release.</p>	
<p>Wrist Flexion and Extension</p> <p>Holding a very light weight, for example half filled bottle of water slowly move the wrist up and down.</p>	

Shoulder Flexion Wall Slide

Standing facing a wall, place your hands on the wall. Slowly slide your hands as far up the wall as pain will allow, then slowly lower back down.

**Wall Press**

Standing facing a wall, place your hands on the wall at shoulder height. Drop your chest towards the wall by bending your elbow. Slowly straighten your arms lifting your chest back away from the wall.

**Safeguarding**

Wiltshire Health and Care (WHC) are committed to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children, young people and adults at risk of abuse, including victims and survivors of domestic abuse. We expect all WHC staff to share this commitment and promote safeguarding by implementing WHC policies and procedures, act promptly on concerns and share information appropriately.

If you or your carer have any concerns regarding a child or adult's safety, please phone Wiltshire Safeguarding Team on 0300 456 0111 (Adult) or 0300 456 0108 (Child) (9am – 5pm Monday - Friday) or please call 999 if you feel they are in immediate danger.

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 123 7797 and whc.pals@nhs.net

Patient and Public Involvement

We value your opinions which will help us to further develop our services.

If you wish to provide feedback or get involved in our patient participation groups, please email the Patient and Public Involvement Officer at ask.wiltshirehealthandcare@nhs.net or telephone 01249 454386.