



University of North Carolina Wilmington  
Abrons Student Health Center

## INSTRUCTION SHEET: ANKLE INJURY Treatment: Crutches and Soft Wrap

The Student Health Provider has diagnosed an ankle injury. The injury is more likely a sprain, but might be a mild fracture. A sprain is a stretching or tear in the ligaments and tendons (rope-like bands holding bones and muscles in place) of a joint. A fracture is a broken bone. No *severe* fracture or dislocation is apparent.

Your injury should be treated carefully. Proper initial treatment of a significant sprain also treats a hidden fracture. Your provider and you will decide whether to send you for an X-ray now, or have you come back for a recheck in a several days. In the meantime, avoid bearing weight on the ankle: Use your crutches to get around.

**Also, X-ray or not, realize that if your symptoms persist, repeat evaluation is necessary.**

### MEASURES YOU SHOULD TAKE TO HELP TREAT YOUR ANKLE INJURY:

1. Above all, put the ankle to rest! Resting the ankle not only decreases pain, it also helps heal the ankle more quickly. Use crutches. Do not walk or stand on the injured leg for at least three days. After three days, start *gradual* weight bearing. If the ankle hurts, back off from bearing weight. If the ankle is improving, gradually ease back into normal walking.
2. A soft wrap/splint helps support the ankle and minimize swelling. If the wrap/splint feels too tight, loosen it.
3. Elevating the ankle is helpful to reduce swelling, especially in the initial two to three days after injury. Keep the ankle up on pillows, above the level of the heart, whenever you can.
4. Apply cold to the ankle off-and-on for two to three days after injury. Cold helps ease discomfort and minimize swelling. Do not apply ice directly to the ankle, causing discomfort. Rather, aim for coolness, yet comfort, applying a layer or two of cloth between the cold pack and ankle.
5. Over-the-counter pain medications can relieve discomfort associated with an injured ankle. Acetaminophen (Tylenol), ibuprofen, or naproxen can be taken, depending on individual preference.
6. After two to three days, apply heat in the form of warm soaks. Moist heat increases circulation in the ankle tissues, promoting healing.
7. If you are getting an X-ray, your provider should call you an X-ray report within 24 hours of getting the x-ray. If you do not hear from your provider, call or return to the Student Health Center to get the report.
8. If you are having severe pain or an unusual problem, return to the Student Health Center or see your personal/referral doctor promptly. Even if your X-ray is “negative” for a fracture, if you continue to have pain or concerns about your ankle, return to Student Health for a recheck. Sometimes fractures are hard to see on initial X-rays; repeat exam and X-rays may be necessary.
9. Realize that once an ankle is sprained, it will be prone to further sprains. High-top shoes or a proper ankle wrap can help protect the ankle during future sports activities. Don’t participate in any sports until you are *fully* recovered.