



University of North Carolina Wilmington
Abrons Student Health Center

INSTRUCTION SHEET: KNEE INJURY Treatment: Crutches & Immobilizer/Brace/Wrap

The Student Health Provider has diagnosed an injury of your knee, most likely a significant sprain. A sprain is a stretching or tear in the ligaments and tendons (rope-like bands holding bones and muscles in place) of a joint. No significant fracture (break) or dislocation is apparent.

A sprain is a significant injury to the joint, and should be *treated*, not ignored. Treatment can help prevent long-term problems with the knee. Also, a hidden break could still be present; proper initial treatment of a sprain also treats a hidden hairline fracture.

Your injury should be treated carefully. Your provider and you will decide whether to send you for an X-ray now, or send you to an orthopedic doctor for further evaluation, or have you come back for a recheck in several days. In the meantime, avoid bearing weight on the knee: 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 KNEE INJURY:

1. Above all, put the knee to rest! Resting the knee not only decreases pain, it also helps heal the knee more quickly. Use crutches. Do not bear weight. Stay off the knee altogether for at least three days. After three days, try *gradual* weight-bearing with the knee immobilizer/brace/wrap. If the knee hurts, back off from weight-bearing. If the knee is improving, *very gradually* ease back into a normal amount of walking.
2. The knee immobilizer/brace/wrap should be worn whenever you are awake. Even when you are using crutches the first few days, the knee immobilizer/brace/wrap helps support the knee. When you begin walking without crutches, the immobilizer/brace/wrap supports the knee and helps prevent further injury.
3. Elevating the knee is helpful to reduce swelling, especially in the first 48 hours after injury
4. Apply cold to the knee off-and-on for the first 48 hours after injury. Cold helps ease discomfort and prevent additional swelling. Do not apply ice directly to the knee, causing discomfort. Rather, aim for coolness, applying a layer or two of cloth between the cold pack and knee.
5. After 48 hours, apply heat in the form of warm soaks. Moist heat increases circulation in the knee tissues, promoting healing.
6. 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.
7. Make a *prompt* follow-up appointment with your personal/referral doctor. A repeat exam and even X-rays may be necessary. If you are unable to get an appointment, return to the Student Health Center within a week for re-check.
8. If you are having severe pain or an unusual problem, return to the Student Health Center or see your personal/referral doctor *promptly*.
9. Plan to allow *at least* four weeks for the knee to heal before you attempt any sports (longer if activity causes discomfort). Realize that once a knee is sprained, it may be prone to further injury. Allow the knee to *fully* heal before you attempt any sports. Avoid contact sports long-term if possible.