

**What is it?**

Ankle sprains are some of the most common sports injuries. An ankle sprain is an injury to the ligaments (bands of tissue that connect bones) that help to keep the ankles stable.

**Causes:**

If there is a sudden twist or roll of the ankle, ligaments on the sides of the ankle can stretch or tear. Most ankle sprains occur when a sudden inward and downward movement of the foot stretches the ligaments on the outside of the ankle.

**Risk Factors:**

Athletes involved in sports requiring quick changes in direction are at higher risk of developing ankle sprains. Cutting and pivoting athletes, such as those involved in soccer, football, tennis, volleyball, and basketball are especially high risk. Athletes who have had ankle sprains before are also at higher risk. Some athletes who return too quickly to their sport after a sprain are more likely to re-injure their ankle.

**Symptoms:**

When the ankle twists, there may be a loud “snap” or “crack” and sudden pain. Swelling and bruising can develop very quickly. Depending on how severe the sprain is it may be difficult to walk.

**Sports Medicine Evaluation:**

A sports medicine physician should examine the injured foot and ankle looking for swelling, areas of pain and possible looseness of the joint. When there is trouble walking or bones are sore in specific areas, x-rays may be done to look for broken bones.

**Treatment:**

A simple ankle sprain is generally treated with ice, anti-inflammatory medicine and support for the ankle with a wrap, ankle brace or walking boot. Crutches may be needed to avoid putting any weight through the injured area. Certain exercises to work on moving the joint, strengthening the ankle and rebuilding balance are a very important part of the treatment of ankle sprains. As the ankle feels better, exercises that mimic everyday activities (called “functional exercises”) can be started and can help to prevent future problems with the ankle.

**Injury Prevention:**

An athlete who has had an ankle sprain is more likely to injure it again, especially for about 6-12 months after the injury. However, there are several ways to protect against injuring the ankle. Supporting the ankle while playing sports by wearing an ankle brace is a good way to help protect it. Exercise training focusing on balance and good muscle control is also helpful.

**Return to Play:**

Athletes return to play once they can do the functional exercises for their sport (like running, jumping, cutting) without pain during or after the workout.