Ankle sprain is a common injury which occurs when the foot is unnaturally twisted, often when walking or running on uneven surfaces.

This twisting motion can cause injury to the ligaments, most commonly, the anterior talofibular ligament on the outside of the ankle. A ligament is soft tissue which connects bone to bone.

Symptoms following ankle sprain include pain, swelling, redness and warmth.

The pain can be worse when you press the affected area or move the foot in certain directions (depending upon which ligament is involved). It can also be painful to stand or walk.

If your ankle is red, warm and swollen it is inflamed. This is a normal reaction of the body and is the start of the healing process, however the body tends to produce more swelling than necessary. This can be painful and prevent you regaining normal movement and strength.

**What should I do if sprain my ankle?**

To begin with you need to manage the swelling. You can use the word RICE to help you remember what to do.

**Rest:** This can help avoid further injury to your ankle
- **DO NOT** continue to run on your ankle and avoid walking long distances.
- Try to stand and walk short distances e.g. around the house

**Ice:** This is the best treatment for inflammation and should be applied as soon as possible.
- Ice helps remove excess heat, decrease swelling and reduce pain
- See our [ice and heat application sheet](#) for further advice on how to apply ice.
**Compression**: Use of an elastic wrap, bandage or tubigrip can provide support and help prevent swelling building up.
- This can be useful if you have to stand for prolonged periods e.g. because of your job.
- DO NOT compress too tightly as this could restrict the blood flow to your foot. If your toes change colour or you start to get pins & needles or numbness in your foot, you should remove the compression.

**Elevation**:  
- Keeping the injured ankle elevated will help the body reabsorb the extra fluid caused by swelling.  
- Sit with the back of your calf propped up on pillows / cushion.  
- Ideally the ankle should be at the level of your heart, but at least higher than your hip.  
- DO NOT use any compression while your foot is up as this could restrict the blood flow to the foot.

**Should I go to my doctor?**
Usually you do not need to go to your doctor with an ankle sprain. However if any of the following occur, you should contact your GP:

- Pain is uncontrolled despite the use of over the counter medications and the above advice. (For any advice on medication please ask your pharmacist.)  
- If you are unable to walk more than a few steps without severe pain  
- If the ankle is not improving after 5 to 7 days. The pain may not be gone but it should be improving.

**Should I go to hospital?**
If you have any of the following, you may have a more serious injury for which you need to go to hospital:

- If there is severe or uncontrolled pain which prevents you walking more than 4 steps.  
- If the injured ankle cannot be moved.  
- If the ankle is misshapen beyond normal swelling  
- If there is pain and swelling in the back of the ankle and you are unable to push your foot down  
- If there is pain or swelling in your leg just below the knee or swelling in the calf muscle.
Movement Exercises

In the first few days you should aim to keep the ankle moving as follows:

Strength and Balance Exercises

As the swelling decreases you need to start balance and strength exercises. Some discomfort in the ankle is normal but you should not do these if the pain is severe.

**DO NOT** try any exercises that you could not do safely before you sprained your ankle.
Stand (fingertips only on back of chair for balance—do not take weight through hands)

Push up on your toes. Repeat 10 times have a 30 second rest then repeat. Keep repeating until your ankle feels tired.

If it is easy to do the above exercise, try putting more weight on the injured foot until you can stand on one leg and push up onto your toes.

Continue to repeat 10 times.

Stand on the injured foot on the floor

Balance for 10 seconds and repeat until your ankle feels tired.

When this is easy, try closing your eyes or standing on a cushion or pillow to make it harder.