

Emergency Department Discharge Advice

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Information

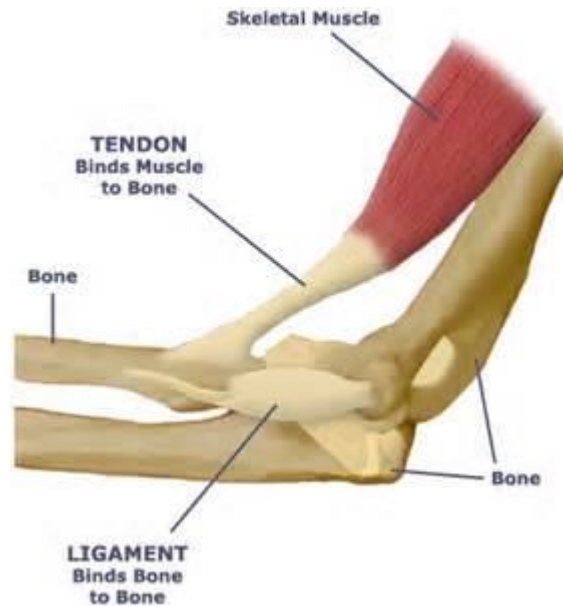
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Sprains and Strains

What are strains and sprains?



A sprain is an injury to a ligament (fibrous tissue connecting two bones together and important for joint stability).

A strain is an injury to the muscle or

tendon (fibrous tissue connecting muscle to bone).

Either a sprain or a strain can vary from mild (stretching but not tearing of the ligamentous / muscle / tendon) fibres to severe with complete rupture of the fibres. Severe sprains can cause significant problems with joint stability.

Often the doctor/ nurse will be able to diagnose a sprain/ strain by examination only, but occasionally an x-ray may be needed.

Treatment

Usually, the damaged ligament or muscle heals by itself over time. Some scar tissue is produced where there has been a tearing of tissues. The main aims of treatment are to keep inflammation, swelling, and pain to a minimum, and to be able to use the joint or muscle normally again as quickly as possible.

Please turn over:

it into two phases – the rest and rehabilitation phases. Severe sprains ruptures will sometimes need a prolonged rest phase in a splint or an the damage.

Rest phase

During the first 24 - 72 hours:

- Rest the injured area for the first 48 – 72 hours. You may need crutches for leg injuries so you can move around
- Elevate the injured limb to reduce swelling
- Apply cold packs or ice (in a towel) to the injured area over the first 72 hours to reduce swelling
- Take regular pain relief
- Avoid massaging the joint – this may aggravate bleeding and swelling

Rehabilitation phase

The earlier you are able to start rehabilitation the quicker the joint / muscle tends to heal. The rehabilitation phase consists of graduated exercises until the muscle/ joint recovers full function. Moderate to severe sprains / strains may take 6 – 8 weeks to recover. In the meantime:

- Continue to take regular pain relief
- Move the affected joint 10 times in each direction as far as you can, 4 times a day until you have recovered full movement
- For weight bearing joints you may need to use crutches as you begin to walk. Gradually increase the amount of weight you put through the injured leg
- If symptoms and range of movement are not improving within 2 - 3 weeks physiotherapy may be helpful. Your GP can arrange this