

Sprains and strains are common injuries of the ligaments and muscles.

What to look for

Sprains, which affect joints, and strains which affect muscles, usually occur after an accident.

For a sprain:

- pain in the joint.
- swelling of a joint.
- difficulty moving a joint.

For a strain:

- sharp pain at injury, followed by stiffness, tenderness, and in some cases, swelling.

Sprains and strains are among the most common injuries. A sprain is the tearing of ligaments, the tissue that connect bones to one another at a joint. The most common sprains are ankles, wrists and thumbs. A strain damages muscle tissue either stretching or tearing it.

These injuries are not fatal and can usually heal themselves. If the injury is more severe it may require surgical repair. This type of damage may weaken the muscles or bones and make them susceptible to injuries in the future. (See also Muscle Pain, tendonitis, Groin Strain, Hamstring Injury.)

Causes

Any accident or occurrence that stresses the joints or muscles beyond their normal tolerance. A new sport or activity, a fall, lifting heavy objects and being overweight.

Traditional Treatment

Your doctor will wish to treat the pain to make it bearable as well as the swelling. You will need to rest the area as much as possible.

Most sprains and strains heal in two to three weeks. Doctors routinely prescribe rest, ice, compression, and elevation immediately following the injury, along with a pain killer. He or she may apply bandages or suggest you use crutches to support the limb while it is healing.

Dietary Considerations

Vitamin C, beta carotene (vitamin A), zinc, vitamin E, and selenium often help speed recovery of sprains and strains.

Hot water bottles applied to the area will help eventually.

Herbal Treatments - For sprains, immediately apply ice to the area, elevate the affected limb, Rest it and apply arnica as a cream or tincture, or a compress of both arnica and comfrey root. Apply directly on the swelling.

Vitamin C and horsetail will help the healing of muscle tissue.

Prevention

Always warm up before doing anything strenuous or when you are going to lift something heavy. Keep strong and fit so your muscles can accept more strenuous activity.

When to seek further professional advice

- the pain, swelling, or stiffness does not improve in two to three days.
- you can't move or bear weight on an injured joint.
- the bones are not aligned properly.