



EmergeOrtho

## Sprained Ankle Treatments to Promote Fast Healing



# Table of Contents

Intro	<b>3</b>
How Do Ankle Sprains Happen?	<b>4</b>
What Are Good Treatments for a Mild Ankle Sprain?	<b>5</b>
When Is an Ankle Sprain More Than an Ankle Sprain?	<b>7</b>
How Do You Treat a More Severe Ankle Sprain?	<b>8</b>
Emerge Stronger. Healthier. Better.	<b>9</b>



**A**cute ankle sprains are one of the most common musculoskeletal injuries, with a high incidence among physically active individuals such as athletes. But as [Dr. Nicholas Viens](#), Board-Certified Orthopedic Surgeon in Durham and Chapel Hill, explains, “It’s not just a sports injury. It can happen anywhere, anytime.”

The numbers bear that out. Approximately [2 million acute ankle sprains occur annually](#) in the United States, with research showing that 70% of individuals who sustain an acute ankle sprain may develop a more long-term physical disability such as chronic ankle instability.

Are sprained ankles treatable? Yes! Whether your sprained ankle is mild, moderate, or more severe, the foot and ankle specialists at EmergeOrtho—Triangle Region can address your unique case. We will explain some options for that a little later. The goal of this eBook, however, is to **provide insights on and drive awareness to the kinds of ankle sprains that can occur and how best to promote fast healing.**

Throughout this eBook for sprained ankle stretching techniques, exercises, and advanced treatments, our board-certified team of [foot and ankle specialists](#) offer guidance on how to rehab a sprained ankle properly and when a specialist may be necessary to avoid further injury, chronic pain, or decrease in function. While our physicians are highly skilled in treating a wide array of foot and ankle conditions, our hope is that we can help you avoid them in the first place!

## In Sprained Ankle Treatments to Promote Fast Healing you will learn about:

- The most common causes of ankle sprains
- Tips and techniques for how to treat a mild ankle sprain
- Knowing when an ankle sprain could be more serious
- Comprehensive treatment options provided by orthopedic specialists
- Ways EmergeOrtho—Triangle Region empowers patients to Emerge Stronger. Healthier. Better. with patient-centered care, multi-faceted treatment options, and expert guidance.



## How Do Ankle Sprains Happen?

**In the intro to this eBook, we talked about how common ankle sprains are and that they belong to a category of acute injuries, meaning they can happen suddenly.**

Now, let's take a deeper look at how ankle sprains happen:

- **Sudden, Unnatural Movements**  
The first group of people that comes to mind when discussing ankle sprains are athletes—and for good reason. Acute ankle sprains occur at high rates across all levels of sports participation, [representing approximately 15% of all injuries](#) sustained during participation in both high school and collegiate team sports.

One common cause of ankle sprains in athletes and other active people is sudden, unnatural movements of the foot. When the foot suddenly twists, rolls, or lands in the wrong way, it can force the ankle joint out of its normal position, overstretching the supporting ligaments, and causing ligament tears.

- **Traumatic Impacts**  
Approximately 60% of all ankle sprains in athletes arise as a [result of direct trauma](#) or due to contact. That includes being tripped or tackled in contact sports or when a direct blow to the lower body occurs, such as in an automobile accident or a fall. Traumatic impacts to any of the bones or soft tissues in your foot or ankle can result in pain and inflammation as well as difficulty walking and an inability to bear weight on the injured foot.
- **Extreme Overuse**  
When we talk about extreme overuse and its link to ankle sprains and injuries, we are typically referring to injury that occurs after periods of intense activity or starting a period of intense activity after a long period of inactivity. When this activity is repeated over and over without properly easing into it, the problem usually gets worse. Because the tendons and bones in your ankles and feet are smaller and softer, they are more prone to an overuse injury when you go beyond what your body is used to.

**Some more insight from Dr. Viens on how ankle sprains can happen in everyday life:** *“People can sprain their ankles walking down the sidewalk, running on a trail, stepping out of a car, carrying a child, or not noticing a toy on the ground. Patients can get injured at work, whether at a construction site or in an office.”*



## What Are Good Treatments for a Mild Ankle Sprain?

If you've experienced a mild injury to the ligaments of the ankle, simple measures can be taken to treat the injury:

### Applying RICE (Rest, Ice, Compression, and Elevation).

**Rest.** Rest heals the body, so it's important to properly rest your ankle to allow a better recovery outcome. Stop, change, or take a break from any activity that may be the cause of your pain or soreness, or contributes to the pain you already have.

**Ice.** Cold reduces pain and swelling so it's a good practice to apply ice or a cold pack right away to minimize swelling. Apply the ice or cold pack for 10 to 20 minutes, 3 or more times per day. After 48 to 72 hours, if swelling is gone, apply heat to the area that hurts. You should never apply ice or heat directly to the skin. Place a barrier like a towel over the cold or heat pack before applying it to the injured ankle.

**Compression.** Compression helps to stabilize the joint and reduce swelling. Keeping your ankle immobile allows it time to heal more effectively. However, you should be careful not to wrap the compression bandage too tightly, so you don't end up cutting off circulation. The goal is to restrict blood flow, but not entirely.

If you feel numbness, tingling, increased pain, coolness, or swelling in the area below the bandage, it's too tight.

**Elevation.** Elevate the injured or sore area on pillows while applying ice any time you are sitting or lying down. Try to keep the area at or above the level of your heart to help minimize swelling.

### Over-the-counter anti-inflammatories or pain relievers.

Common over-the-counter anti-inflammatories like NSAIDs (Advil, Motrin, Aleve) can help relieve inflammation associated with a mild ankle sprain. Acetaminophen (Tylenol, Paracetamol) also helps to relieve pain, as it belongs to a class of medications called analgesics. There is [some debate](#) as to which works most effectively for something like an ankle sprain, but, as always, consult your doctor.



### **Sprained Ankle Stretching & Exercises.**

Once your pain and swelling have been reduced, you can try some ankle sprain rehab exercises or stretches to slowly and carefully introduce some motion to the affected area. Use your pain level to guide you in doing these exercises. If you have more than mild pain, you should pause and return to the exercises at a later time.

Keep in mind that the timing and type of rehab exercises recommended for you may vary according to your doctor's or physical therapist's preferences.

#### **• Range-of-motion exercises.**

Here are two of the simplest range-of-motion exercises to perform for a sprained ankle:

1) Trace the alphabet with your toe. This encourages ankle movement in all directions. Do it slowly and trace the alphabet about 1 to 3 times.

2) Sit in a chair with your foot flat on the floor. Slowly move your knee from side to side while keeping your foot pressed flat. Continue for 2 to 3 minutes.

#### **• Sprained ankle stretching techniques.**

As soon as you can do so without pain, you can try the following exercises to stretch your [Achilles tendon](#). If you need to sit down, the towel stretch may be the better option. If you can stand, you can try the calf stretch.

#### **• Towel Stretch.**

- 1) Place a rolled towel under the ball of your foot, holding the towel at both ends.
- 2) Gently pull the towel toward you while keeping your knee straight.
- 3) Hold this position for 15 to 30 seconds.
- 4) Repeat 2 to 4 times.

#### **• Calf Stretch.**

- 1) Stand facing a wall with your hands on the wall at about eye level. Put the leg you want to stretch about a step behind your other leg.
- 2) Keeping your back heel on the floor, bend your front knee until you feel a stretch in the back leg.
- 3) Hold the stretch for 15 to 30 seconds.
- 4) Repeat 2 to 4 times.

With proper rest and non-surgical care as outlined above, mild, low-grade ankle sprains will usually heal in 1 to 3 weeks. Moderate injuries may take between 3 and 4 weeks. Because of limited blood flow to the ligaments of the ankle, more severe injuries may take between 3 and 6 months to heal. Even in cases of mild sprains, talking to your doctor about appropriate treatments should always be the first step you take.



## When Is an Ankle Sprain More Than an Ankle Sprain?

**Close consultation with an orthopedic specialist is important, as other injuries often occur along with an ankle sprain.**

A sprain might mask something more serious, like a fracture, stretched or torn tendons, torn ligaments, or a cartilage injury. If sprained ankle stretching techniques or exercises are causing more pain, or if conservative pain management is no longer effective, it may be time to examine any underlying causes.

If you're experiencing any of the following symptoms, your first step should be a consultation with an orthopedic physician who specializes in the [foot and ankle](#).

- Persistent swelling
- Feelings of instability
- Trouble on uneven ground
- Weakness in the ankle
- General discomfort

If these symptoms sound familiar, then you may be suffering from something more than an ankle sprain. If the sprain isn't getting better, it's always best to be proactive. Untreated, conditions can worsen into [chronic ankle sprains and instability](#), which can be debilitating in the long term. This may make arthritis of the ankle more likely, especially if the ankle is allowed to continue to deteriorate.

Diagnostic imaging is the next step to determine the best method for treating your ankle. With an MRI, an orthopedic provider can work with you on an approach for treating any underlying conditions or extensive injuries.

**Close consultation with an orthopedic specialist is important, as other injuries often occur along with an ankle sprain.**



## How Do You Treat a More Severe Ankle Sprain?

**In the event that conservative treatment does not effectively address the symptoms associated with an ankle sprain injury, some conditions may be addressed surgically.**

“Sometimes, surgery is necessary,” explains Dr. Viens. “The procedure can be anything from minimally-invasive arthroscopy to a ligament tightening procedure.”

The type of treatment utilized for your case will vary depending on the type and severity of your sprain. Most likely, your treatment will involve one or more of the following:

- For more severe ankle sprains, immobilization is often needed. Your doctor may fit you in a boot or prescribe crutches for a period of time to prevent movement of the ankle joint and to allow the ankle to heal.
- Physical therapy is often an integral part of treating an ankle sprain. Our physicians often prescribe physical therapy as a way to see if you can get better on your own or if more action may be needed. Our

physical therapists work with you as a team to build back strength, range of motion, stability, and confidence on your feet.

- If inflammation won’t go away following these other measures, your doctor may prescribe steroid injections.

### **Advanced Surgical Treatments**

Advanced technology and a better understanding of ankle ligaments have enabled EmergeOrtho—Triangle Region to offer procedures to anatomically reconstruct the ligament and create a stable ankle. More advanced treatments options provided by our orthopedic team include:

- Achilles tendon repair and reconstruction
- Total ankle replacement and reconstruction
- Operative fixation of ankle fractures
- Sports medicine injuries (of the foot and ankle including stress fractures, Jones fractures of the fifth metatarsal, acute and chronic ankle sprains, subtalar instability, and Lis Franc injuries)

**“Sometimes, surgery is necessary,” explains Dr. Viens. “The procedure can be anything from minimally-invasive arthroscopy to a ligament tightening procedure.”**

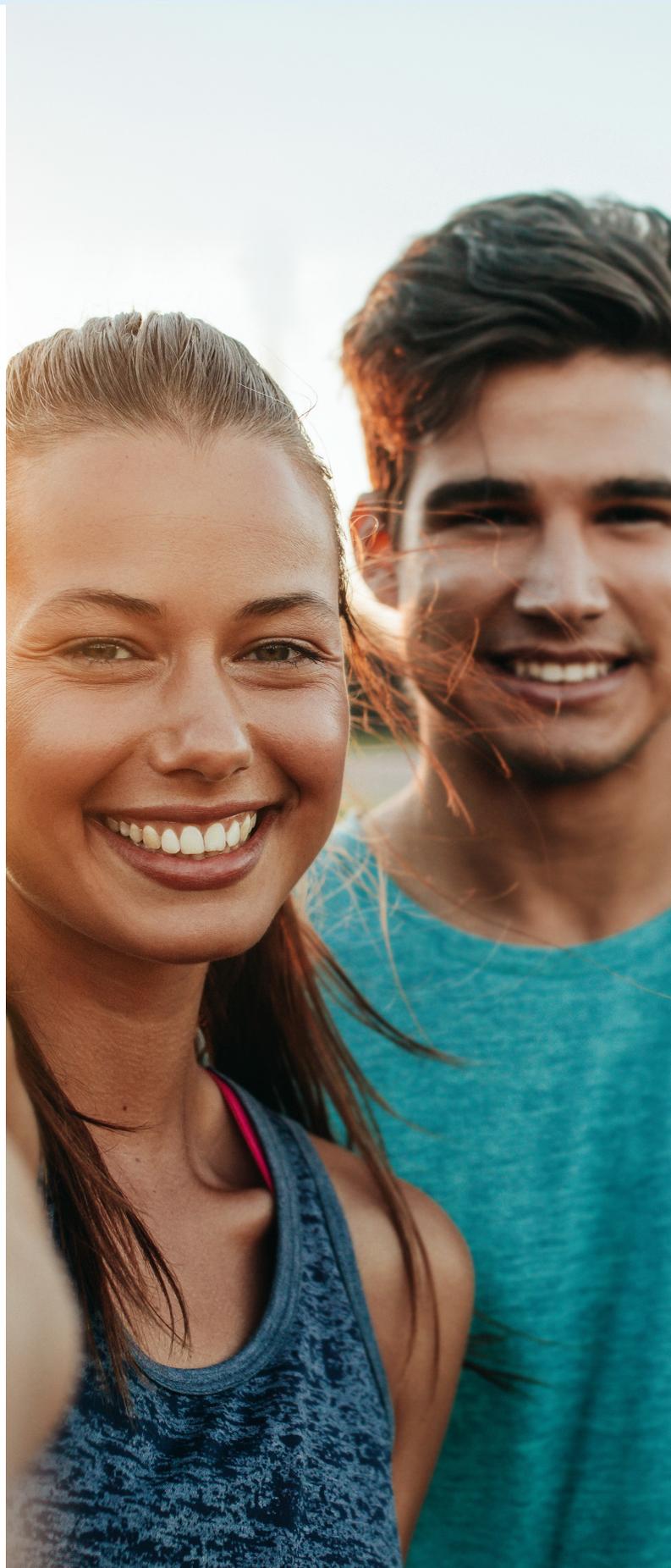
# Emerge Stronger. Healthier. Better.

As our eBook on [sprained ankle stretching, exercises, and treatment options](#) has demonstrated, our **EmergeOrtho—Triangle Region** doctors have the expertise, skills, and dedication to achieve restorative, lasting outcomes for our patients.

We believe that when it comes to helping prevent and treat injuries, multi-faceted and personalized approaches work best.

From diagnosis and treatment to recovery and follow-up, the foot and ankle experts at EmergeOrtho—Triangle Region are dedicated to ensuring you receive the most effective, exceptional care available.

To learn more about conditions associated with [ankle sprains](#) or to find out more about the orthopedic services and specialties we offer, we encourage you to reach out any time by calling **(919) 220-5255**. Or, [self-schedule an appointment](#) with one of our experts now.





**Triangle Region**

**800.359.3053**