

For ankle sprains, think RICE

Rest, ice, compression and elevation can heal most sprains

When star quarterback Patrick Mahomes lifted the Lombardi trophy following Super Bowl 57, it came with a small price.

The Kansas City Chiefs signal caller reinjured a high ankle sprain during the big game.

Mahomes' case is unique, says Ali Ball, an OSF HealthCare exercise coordinator. The stakes were high, and the quarterback had a world-class medical staff.

For the average person, though, Ball advises taking the proper steps to recover from an ankle sprain.

"Take it easy," she says. "You don't want to rush it."

What is an ankle sprain?

Ball says an ankle sprain (also called rolling your ankle) describes any awkward movement of your ankle that causes your ligaments to overstretch or tear. It often happens when someone steps in a hole or on an object during everyday activities. In sports, athletes can step on someone's foot and sprain their ankle.

"You'll feel the stretch and instant pain," Ball says. "That's when you know you probably have an ankle sprain."

Other symptoms include swelling, bruising, tender skin and limited range of motion.

Treatment

Ball says when you sprain your ankle or think you have, get off your feet. Don't shake it off and keep walking. See a health care provider as soon as possible.,

Thankfully, Ball says, most ankle sprains heal with self-care. She says to remember the acronym RICE.

- Rest – Stay off your feet for a few days.
- Ice – Apply ice to your ankle to reduce swelling. Ice the ankle for 15 to 20 minutes every two to three hours for at least two days.
- Compression – Wrap the ankle in an elastic bandage to reduce swelling.
- Elevate – Raise the foot above your heart when resting. This also helps with swelling.

"After that initial few days, a doctor will want you to do physical therapy. You'll do exercises that help increase ankle stability," Ball says.

An ankle brace or boot or taping your ankle may also be a part of your recovery. These limit unwanted movement.

Ball says in severe cases where you completely tear a ligament, a doctor will recommend surgery.

"When you don't treat sprains properly, it can lead to some long-term issues," Ball warns. "You can have chronic instability in the ankle which can lead to degenerative arthritis and tendon inflammation."

“That’s not a good situation,” she says.

Avoiding sprains

Any exercise expert will preach the value of a quality shoe. That’s the same for avoiding ankle sprains, Ball says. Find a walking or running shoe that fits and has good arch support. A health care provider or fitness expert at a shoe store can advise you on what footwear is best.

When you exercise outside, try to stay on level ground.

“When you’re walking, pay attention to your terrain. If you’re walking around your town, watch for holes and rocks,” Ball says.

“For trail running, you can’t always avoid the rough terrain. So you would want to take preventive measures,” she says.

Those include strength training and balance exercises. Ankle braces and tape can also be preventive measures.