

SPRAINS AND STRAINS

Running, aerobics and other forms of exercise are good for your health, but these activities can raise your risk for sprained joints, strained muscles and other minor injuries. Proper care in the first day or two after injury can reduce the time you're sidelined by it. Should you suffer a sprain, strain, pull, tear or other muscle or joint injury, treat it with **R.I.C.E.** -- **Rest, Ice, Compression and Elevation.**

R.I.C.E. can relieve pain, limit swelling and protect the injured tissue, all of which help to speed healing. After an injury occurs, the damaged area will bleed (externally or internally) and become inflamed. Healing occurs as the damaged tissue is replaced by collagen, perhaps better known as scar tissue. Ideally, the scar tissue needs complete repair before a full return to sport is recommended.

The R.I.C.E. Method of Acute Injury Treatment Includes:

- **Rest:** Resting is important immediately after injury for two reasons. First, rest is vital to protect the injured muscle, tendon, ligament or other tissue from further injury. Second, your body needs to rest so it has the energy it needs to heal itself most effectively.

- **Ice:** Use ice bags, cold packs or even a bag of frozen peas wrapped in a thin towel to provide cold to the injured area. Cold can provide short-term pain relief. It also limits swelling by reducing blood flow to the injured area. Keep in mind that you should never leave ice on an injury for more than 15-20 minutes at a time. Longer exposure can damage your skin. The best rule is to apply cold compresses for 15 minutes and then leave them off for at least 20 minutes.

- **Compression:** Compression limits swelling, which slows down healing. Some people notice pain relief from compression as well. An easy way to compress the area of the injury is to wrap a Crepe bandage (available from chemists) over it. If you feel throbbing or if the wrap just feels too tight, remove the bandage and re-wrap the area so the bandage is a little looser.

- **Elevation:** Elevating an injury reduces swelling. It's most effective when the injured area is raised above the level of the heart. For example, if you injure an ankle, try lying on your bed with your foot propped on one or two pillows.

After a day or two of R.I.C.E., many sprains, strains or other injuries will begin to heal. But if your pain or swelling does not decrease after 48 hours, make an appointment to see your doctor.

Once the healing process has begun, very light massage may improve the function of forming scar tissue, cut healing time and reduce the possibility of injury recurrence.

Gentle stretching can be begun once all swelling has subsided. Try to work the entire range of motion of the injured joint or muscle, but be extremely careful not to force a stretch, or you risk re-injury to the area. Keep in mind that a stretch should never cause pain.

Heat may be helpful once the injury moves out of the acute phase and swelling and bleeding has stopped. Moist heat will increase blood supply to the damaged area and promote healing. Heat packs are available in most chemists including Whelehans in Mullingar

Finally, after the injury has healed, strengthening exercises can begin.

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