



## SPRAINS & STRAINS FACT SHEET



**THE ADELAIDE & MEATH  
HOSPITAL, DUBLIN**  
INCORPORATING THE NATIONAL  
CHILDRENS HOSPITAL

### Patient Information Leaflet

in a lot of sports, referral for physiotherapy may be useful.

#### *Activity*

Most patients will require a number of weeks before they can return to sports and gym class. You will be given advice on the number of weeks necessary.

#### *Preventive Action*

- Wear a helmet when cycling
- Use wrist supports, elbow and knee pads for skateboarding, skating or roller blading
- When playing football, soccer, hurling or rugby correct equipment should always be worn



Developed by Orla Callender, ANP,  
Dr. John Craven, Senior Registrar,  
Dr. Ciara Martin, ED Consultant,  
Children's ED.

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### *What is a strain?*

A strain is an injury to muscle from over stretching.

### *What is a sprain?*

A sprain is an overstretching injury to a ligament. Ligaments are the strong elastic bands of tissue that hold bones together at the joints. Following a sprain the child may experience pain, swelling, heat and sometimes bruising or redness around the joint. They may also experience difficulty weight bearing and walking with an ankle sprain.

### *Treatment*

A severe sprain may sometimes be treated with a plaster cast but otherwise follow the 'RICE' rule:

**Rest:** rest in the first 24 hours. While the injured area is swollen and painful activities should be limited.

**Ice:** the injured area should be kept cool (but not frozen) to the touch over the first 24 hours by **using** ice packs. Never apply ice directly onto the skin, as this may cause tissue damage. Always use a barrier, such as a cloth, between the icepack and the skin to help protect the tissue. Packets of frozen peas are a useful icepack. Ice should be used for 20 minutes every few hours.

**Compression:** a compression or support bandage, such as a 'tubigrip' may help to reduce the swelling and provide support. The support bandage should not be worn at night or if it becomes too tight. If your child complains of the fingers or toes feeling numb or looking pale or blue the bandage should be removed at once.

**Elevation (lifting up the injured area):** is very important in reducing pain and swelling. Lifting up the injured area above the level of the heart is advised. A sling should be used for an arm injury and bed rest with an injured leg on a pillow or sitting with the foot raised.

### *Medicines*

These medicines will help treat your child's pain:

- Paracetamol (see bottle for instructions)
- Ibuprofen (see bottle for instructions)

### *Recovery*

A mild strain may take about 1 week to heal. A bad sprain may take as long as 3 to 4 weeks to heal. While your strain or sprain heals, rest and avoid painful activities.

24 hours following the injury, early careful movement should be encouraged as this aids a rapid return to normal activity.

If your child is able to partially weight bear we do not recommend crutches.

For ankle injuries, balancing exercises are recommended. This helps with foot co-ordination. Ask your child to stand on one leg and they will see how 'wobbly' the affected side is compared to the other leg. They should practice balancing on one foot many times a day, for example, when brushing teeth or washing hands or standing beside the bed before getting in.

### *Physiotherapy*

Children who sustain strains or sprains generally do not require physiotherapy. Children tend to do their own physiotherapy by returning to activity quickly.

However, if your child is involved