

INFORMATION FOR PATIENTS

Soft tissue injury – early management

This leaflet intends to educate you on the immediate management of your soft tissue injury. It also contains advice regarding pain management and lifestyle choices.

You may require one-to-one physiotherapy if you are still struggling with your injury after a few weeks of following this advice. If so, please contact us via the following information.

Contact details

Physiotherapy Department
Clinic 10
Telephone: 01623 672384

King's Mill Hospital
Mansfield Road
Sutton-in-Ashfield
Notts
NG17 4JL

What is a soft tissue injury?

The term 'soft tissue injury' is used to describe injuries to the ligaments, tendons and muscles in the body, rather than the harder bones. Examples of soft tissue injuries include:

- Sprains – caused by disruption to the fibres of the ligaments that reinforce the joints.
- Strains/muscle contusions – disruptions to the muscle/tendon fibres.
- Bruises – disruption to the small blood vessels causing discolouration and swelling.

These injuries are very common and may be caused by an accident (such as a trip or fall), or a sudden change or increase in an activity which can overload the tissues and cause them to become inflamed (e.g. spending all day in the garden, or starting running after a long break).

Symptoms you may experience:

- Pain and tenderness around the injured area.
- Swelling, bruising and redness depending on the grade of the injury.
- Weakness of the muscles or inability to use them at all.

Management

Soft tissue injuries are initially managed with five steps. This can be remembered with the word **POLICE**.

- **P**rotect the injury with relative rest (keep moving but rest often) for the first 72 hours.
- **O**ptimal **L**oading by gradually increasing the weight or use through the affected limb early on, as pain allows. Evidence suggests this aids quicker recovery. If you are struggling with your walking or weight bearing, you may be provided with crutches to help.
- **I**ce, **C**ompression and **E**levation of the affected area to aid with reducing the swelling is also important.

It's also important to start some gentle exercises. If required, your physiotherapist can issue a graded exercise programme.

As the pain starts to settle down you should be able to gradually return to normal activity as comfort allows. If your injury is in the leg, try to walk as normally as possible; early weight bearing can aid quicker recovery.

Pain management

If you are able to take simple pain relief this may help initially, however, if you are not sure whether you can take them, please speak to either a pharmacist or your GP.

Keeping mobile and exercising will help to increase your confidence and reduce the pain and swelling around the site of injury.

Factors affecting healing

Healing usually takes six to eight weeks. However, experiencing discomfort and swelling for longer than this is normal for this type of injury.

Staying on top of the following factors can help move the healing process along and give your ankle the best chance of a quick recovery.

Stress relief - utilise techniques such as mindfulness, meditation and deep breathing cycles. Speak to your health care professional for more information.

Sleep hygiene - consistently getting six to nine hours is recommended by the NHS. Only use your bedroom for sleep, not (for example) for TV.

Nutrition - make sure you have a balanced diet. Vitamin D has been proven to help with a reduction in joint pain.

Smoking – this has been linked with musculoskeletal pain and delayed healing. For more advice click on the following link: <https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/quit-smoking/nhs-stop-smoking-services-help-you-quit/> or ask your therapist for more information.

Alcohol – avoid this in the early stages of healing (first three days). Evidence has shown this can slow down recovery and increase the chances of re-injury.

Frequently asked questions

Will a soft tissue injury heal itself and how long will it take?

The majority of muscle strain injuries will heal by themselves within two weeks. Severe sprains and strains can take months to get back to normal. Occasionally, when there is a complete rupture of the muscle or tendon, further intervention is required.

When can I return to my sport or activity?

The goal is to help you return to your sport or hobbies as soon as is safely possible. Everyone recovers from injury at a different rate. We would advise for you to avoid strenuous exercise such as running for up to eight weeks, as there's a risk of further damage.

Return to sport or activity will be determined by how soon your injury recovers, not by days and weeks. For example, when you can:

- Fully bend and straighten the surrounding joints without pain.
- Your injured limb has regained strength compared to the uninjured limb.

With regard to lower limb injuries and return to higher level sports such as football, rugby, skiing etc., we would advise you should:

- Be able to jog without a limp.
- Be able to change direction without pain.
- Be able to jump and hop on the injured leg without pain or giving way.

Your physiotherapist can provide advice regarding returning to specific sports and will progress your exercises to target more sport specific activities. Normally, the twisting or change of direction element is the area that takes the longest to rehabilitate.

Further sources of information

NHS Choices: www.nhs.uk/conditions

Our website: www.sfh-tr.nhs.uk

Patient Experience Team (PET)

PET is available to help with any of your compliments, concerns or complaints, and will ensure a prompt and efficient service.

King's Mill Hospital: 01623 622515

Newark Hospital: 01636 685692

Email: sfh-tr.PET@nhs.net

If you would like this information in an alternative format, for example large print or easy read, or if you need help with communicating with us, for example because you use British Sign Language, please let us know. You can call the Patient Experience Team on 01623 672222 or email sfh-tr.PET@nhs.net.

This document is intended for information purposes only and should not replace advice that your relevant health professional would give you.

External websites may be referred to in specific cases. Any external websites are provided for your information and convenience. We cannot accept responsibility for the information found on them.

If you require a full list of references for this leaflet (if relevant) please email sfh-tr.patientinformation@nhs.net or telephone 01623 622515, extension 6927.

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