

# Sprains and Strains

## WHAT IS IT?

A sprain is an injury that causes a stretch or tear in a ligament. Ligaments are strong bands of tissue that connect bones to a joint.

A strain is a stretch or tear of a muscle or tendon. Tendons are bands of tissue that attach muscles to bones. People often call a strain a “pulled muscle”.

## WHAT CAUSES IT?

A twisting or severe stretching of a joint is the usual cause of a sprain. Sprains commonly occur in knee, ankle, and finger joints.

The usual cause of a muscle strain is the forceful stretching of a muscle during physical activity. This might occur when you run, jump, throw or lift a heavy object.

## SYMPTOMS

### Sprain

- Swollen, painful joint
- Difficulty moving the injured joint
- Skin of the joint may look red initially and then bruised

### Strain

- Burning or popping sensation in the joint at the time of injury
- Pain in the injured muscle at rest or with use
- Area of the injury may be swollen and/or bruised.

sling, splint, or crutches as well as the need for an X-ray to rule out a fracture or other injury.

## SELF CARE

**R**est - avoid activities that cause pain

**I**ce - apply ice packs on the area for 20 to 30 minutes, every 3 to 4 hours for 2 to 3 days until pain and swelling go away.

**C**ompression - wrap an elastic bandage (ACE® wrap) around the injured joint or muscle

**E**levation - keep the injured joint or muscle elevated at or above the level of your heart as much as possible. If possible, elevate onto the chair in front of you when seated in class.

An anti-inflammatory medication (ibuprofen) or other pain reliever (acetaminophen) may help reduce pain and swelling after the injury. Always follow package instructions.

Depending on the extent of the injury, you may need to see a healthcare provider to assess the need for a brace,

**The information presented here is not intended to be used for the diagnosis of a health problem or as a substitute for consulting a licensed medical professional. When using an Over-the-Counter medication please be sure to follow the package instructions. [Contact Health Services](#) if you have any additional questions, concerns or to make an appointment.**