

Treating a High Ankle Sprain



A high ankle sprain involves a stretching or tearing of the ligaments that bind the two lower leg bones (the tibia and fibula) together at the place where they meet the anklebone (the talus). This complex joint is called the ankle syndesmosis, and these sprains sometimes are called ankle syndesmotic sprains. Unlike most ankle sprains that occur when the foot rolls inward, **the foot being forced upward and the ankle forcibly rotating outward cause high ankle sprains.** This type of injury is most common in high-level football players, ice hockey players and snow skiers.

High ankle sprains are serious injuries that take at least twice as long to heal as more common sprains and always need physical therapy to rehabilitate the ankle. These

sprains are treated initially with **PRICE: P**rotection, **R**est, **I**ce, **C**ompression and **E**levation.

Even with a mild sprain, you will need to use crutches for a week or more to keep all weight off the ankle. If the ligaments are partially torn rather than just stretched, your ankle may be put in a cast for 4 to 6 weeks. Complete ligament tears require surgery to insert a screw to hold the leg bones together while the ligament heals. Recovery can take anywhere from 6 weeks for a mild sprain to 6 months or longer for sprains requiring surgery.

As part of the rehabilitation process, physical therapy should begin as soon as possible and may continue for anywhere from a few weeks to several months, depending on the severity of the sprain. We can work with your doctor to develop an **exercise program that begins by extending range of motion in the ankle and then moves on to strengthening and balance exercises** so that you can return to your sport as soon as safely possible.