

# You Ask, They Answer



**Q: What's the difference between sprains and strains and what are their telltale signs?**

**A:** A strain occurs when a muscle or tendon becomes overstretched or torn. A sprain results from a ligament being overstretched or torn. Ligaments are tough fibrous tissues located around the joints, connecting bones to each other.

Symptoms of a strain include swelling, muscle weakness, muscle cramps, bruising, and difficulties moving the affected area.

A sprain, on the other hand, can cause limited movement around the joint, a 'popping' sound during the time of injury, pain, bruising, and swelling around the affected area.

However, it may sometimes be difficult to distinguish between the two. Sometimes a strain can also happen with a sprain, adding to the ambiguity.

**Q: Can patients with strains or sprains treat them at home? If yes, what should they do?**

**A:** Early treatment can be started at home with a simple protocol called R.I.C.E.

**Rest** – Rest the affected area as much as possible.

**Ice** – Apply a cold compress (wrap the ice pack with a towel

rather than applying it directly to skin) to the affected area every 2–3 hours.

**Compression** – Reduce swelling by wrapping the affected area with a medical-grade elastic bandage. Seek medical attention if unsure about the right technique.

**Elevation** – Keep the injured area above the level of your heart to reduce swelling and pain. For example, if you've sprained your ankle, prop it up on one or two pillows.

**Q: Are there any cases when a doctor should be consulted? If yes, should they see an orthopaedist or a general practitioner?**

**A:** In certain scenarios, one should seek medical attention, be it from a general practitioner or an orthopaedist:

1. Inability to bear weight on a joint, e.g., the foot, ankle, or knee, may indicate a more severe injury, like a fracture.
2. Persistent pain despite RICE therapy and pain medications. Most strains and sprains get better within a week. So if pain persists beyond that, one should seek medical help.
3. Inability to move or bend a joint. This may suggest a more serious underlying problem, like a meniscus tear in the knee or a tendon rupture.
4. Significant swelling or deformity. This may be caused by an underlying fracture or dislocation.
5. Recurring pain.

**Q: How long does it take for patients to recover?**

**A:** This depends on the severity of the strain or sprain. Most soft tissue musculoskeletal injuries (i.e., with no bony involvement) take anywhere from a few days to up to six weeks to heal.

**Q: When is additional treatment, like physiotherapy, recommended?**

**A:** A specialist orthopaedic surgeon will typically first conduct a thorough clinical assessment, which may include imaging, such as x-rays and MRI scans. Depending on the final diagnosis, treatment can be conservative, e.g., medications, rest, physiotherapy, orthotics, or other therapy. If conservative treatment is insufficient, surgery can be performed via the "keyhole" minimally-invasive method or open method, depending on the condition to be treated.

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