



At-home Treatment for Foot and Ankle Injuries

Whether it's a rolled ankle during a basketball game, sudden heel pain that seems to come out of nowhere or a broken toe, chances are you or your child will experience a foot or ankle injury at some point. We share tips on how to treat these frequent injuries at-home and when to seek professional care.

It's important to stay active and make exercise a part of you and your family's daily routine. However, whether you are a competitive athlete, a weekend warrior, a little leaguer or you simply exercise to stay in shape, foot and ankle injuries are common.

When these injuries occur, it can be difficult to determine what to do next in order to return to a sport or exercise routine. It's important to act fast and treat an injury before the pain gets worse.

"Assessing and treating a foot or ankle injury is important to the healing process and helps determine a proper plan for return to sport or activity," said Dr. Daniel Lehman, an OrthoIndy foot and ankle specialist. "Many injuries can be treated with rest, ice, compression and elevation, but some injuries might need more care or professional treatment."

If you or your child has an open wound, a concussion, a burn, an animal bite or they are bleeding, go to an emergency room right away. OrthoIndy trauma physicians are located at the **Trauma Center at St. Vincent Indianapolis**, and there is a team of experts on call 24/7 to handle orthopedic traumas.



Immediate Care for Foot or Ankle Injuries

"In general, if you are not in extreme pain and can still move the injured body part, the R.I.C.E. method is a good start for initial treatment of an injury," said Dr. Lehman. "Another good indicator is whether or not you can put weight on your foot or ankle or if you are able to walk or not."

R.I.C.E. and Pain Medication

- **Rest:** Modify activities according to pain or minimize use
- **Ice:** Ice your foot or ankle intermittently during the first 24 to 48 hours by using a thin towel and applying ice for 20 minutes every two hours; never put ice directly on the skin
- **Compression:** Bandages or wraps can be used to reduce swelling and restrict movement; do not apply wrap too tightly
- **Elevation:** Raise your injured limb to an elevated and resting position above your heart
- **Over-the-counter Pain Medication:** Aspirin or ibuprofen can reduce swelling and pain; follow the instructions on the bottle

What if I think I broke my toe?

You can still use the R.I.C.E. method and over-the-counter pain medication to decrease pain and swelling. You can also use the buddy taping method to tape the injured toe to an adjacent toe while it heals.

If your injured toe has an open wound or significant deformity, visit an emergency room right away. If not, you can wait and make an appointment with a foot and ankle specialist. Contrary to popular belief, it's best to have a doctor look at a broken toe to avoid more serious problems like broken bones not aligning properly or at all, arthritis or long-term foot pain.

Most times, a **broken toe** will heal in four to six weeks.

"Over-the-counter medications such as Tylenol or ibuprofen are also helpful in reducing swelling and relieving pain from a foot or ankle injury."
- Dr. Lehman.

At-home Treatment for Foot or Ankle Injuries

Many foot or ankle injuries are not severe and do not need treatment from a medical professional. In addition to R.I.C.E. and over-the-counter medications there are few other treatment options to try at home.

Rest or a Change in Activity

"Common foot and ankle injuries are often a result of overuse and will go away with rest," said Dr. Lehman. "**Plantar fasciitis**, **heel pain** or **tendinitis** are often your body's way of saying it needs a break."

According to Dr. Lehman, you should rest your injured body part or at least stop the activity that was causing you pain for two full weeks.

"A full two weeks is important after experiencing persistent pain," said Dr. Lehman. "Many active individuals rest for a day or two and stop feeling pain, so they think it's okay to return to the activity. However, most times the pain will return immediately, and they are right back where they started."

For example, if running is causing you heel pain, stop running for at least two weeks. If you want to continue exercising, try cycling or swimming.

Stretching and Strengthening Exercises

Once the swelling and pain is lessened enough to resume movement, many overuse injuries can be treated with gentle stretching and strengthening exercises.

Ankle Taping or Bracing

If you are experiencing ankle pain or you have sprained your ankle, using an ACE wrap or an ankle brace will offer extra support. Using an ankle brace or wrap during activity can also help reduce the chance of injury or reinjury of the ankle as well.

"I would recommend buying an ankle brace or ACE wrap instead of taping your ankle yourself with medical tape," said Dr. Lehman. "Unless you have an athletic trainer or medical professional tape your ankle you may tape it incorrectly and a wrap or brace is the safer choice."

How to Tape an Ankle for Support

Wrapping a sprained or injured ankle correctly is important in the healing process. A step-by-step process helps reduce swelling and obtain optimal support.

If you are using tape instead of a cloth bandage, make sure to apply pre-wrap with the same steps, before beginning with the tape.



Step 1: Flex your foot so it's at a 90-degree angle with your shin. Hold the bandage at the side of your foot, right below your toes at the ball of your foot.

Begin wrapping the bandage tightly, but not so tight that it cuts off circulation. Pull the bandage over the top and under, overlapping the bandage somewhat while covering the ball of your foot.



Step 2: Once you have wrapped most of the ball of your foot, bring the wrap across the top of your foot and circle around the ankle and then back down diagonally to the ball of your foot. Continue the figure eight pattern across the top, around the ankle and under the arch moving toward the heel on the bottom and the calf at the top.



Step 3: Once you have used all the bandage, use tape or a metal fastener to keep it in place. If you are using tape, once you feel like you have enough support, you can rip the tape off.

When to Seek Medical Care for a Foot or Ankle Injury

"If you are in extreme pain and you feel like something is seriously wrong, seek care right away," said Dr. Lehman. "If you have a lot of swelling, bruising or numbness, or if you can't put your foot down or walk on it, you may have a fracture. Ignoring the pain or trying to 'tough it out' can actually cause a lot more damage."

Signs You Should go to an ER

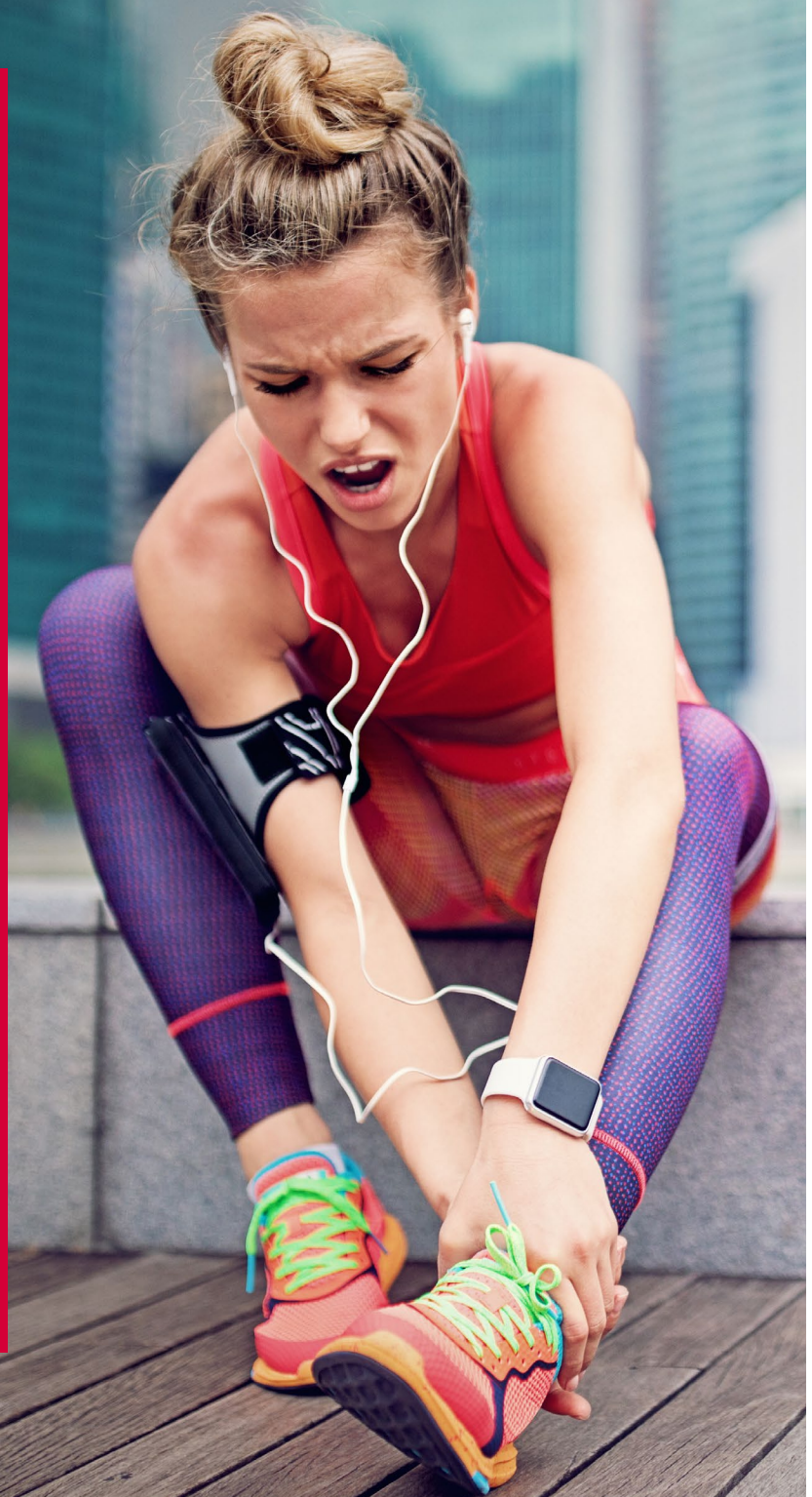
- You have an open wound
- You have signs of infection such as redness, warmth and tenderness

Signs You Should go to an Urgent Care or ER

- You have pain that makes you feel nauseous or keeps you from sleeping
- You are unable to walk
- You are unable to move the injured body part
- You have severe swelling

Signs You Should Make an Appointment with a Foot and Ankle Specialist

- You have persistent pain that doesn't improve after a few weeks
- You have swelling that doesn't improve after a few days of at-home treatment
- You are experiencing numbness or tingling in your foot or ankle



Foot or Ankle Injury and Children

Whether it's a slip on the playground or a fall during a sporting event, children seem like they are always getting hurt. Sometimes it can be hard to decide whether the injury is serious or not and if they should be assessed by a medical professional.

A good rule of thumb is whether or not the child can sleep or bear weight on the foot or ankle. If they are unable to sleep comfortably or walk, it might be a sign that something is seriously wrong.

According to Dr. Lehman, there can often be a fracture even when the child can move the affected area. He recommends that if your child is not tolerating the home care, it is always best to get an X-ray to make sure.

"Generally, if they aren't much better the next day, I would have them come into one of our urgent care clinics or make an appointment with a foot or ankle specialist," said Dr. Lehman.



Visit **OrthoIndy Urgent Care** located throughout Indianapolis with weekend and evening hours or **make an appointment** with an **OrthoIndy foot and ankle specialist**.



With years of experience and the most advanced technology, OrthoIndy foot and ankle specialists will give you or your child the best chance possible to get back to an active lifestyle. **Make an appointment** or visit one of our urgent care clinics and let OrthoIndy's team of experts help you get normal back, whatever your normal looks like.



To help you better understand what you or your child's pain means, what might be causing it and how you can prevent future injuries view our **Ultimate Guide to Foot and Ankle Injuries**.

