

How to Wrap a Sprained Ankle

Expert
Reviewed

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Ankle sprains are very common. A sprain occurs when you roll or twist your ankle in an odd way, stretching or even tearing a ligament on the outside of your ankle. If left untreated, an ankle sprain can lead to long-term problems; however, most sprains can be treated with the RICE (Rest, Ice, Compression, Elevate) method. The steps below show you how to properly execute the compression step in treating a sprained ankle.^{[1][2][3]}

Part
1

Wrapping With Athletic Tape

- 1 Decide if athletic tape is right for you.** In most cases, it's best to use a cloth bandage to wrap a sprain; however, some individuals engaged in athletic activity, such as running, prefer the feel of athletic tape.
 - While athletic tape works to wrap an injured ankle, it is primarily made to wrap an uninjured joint before activity to *avoid* injury, not to protect an already injured ankle.
 - Even though the thinner, sturdier athletic tape makes continued activity easier than the bulkier, more flexible cloth bandage, continued athletic activity on a sprained ankle is not advised.^[4]
- 2 Begin with an underwrap.** Underwrap is a nonadhesive material used to wrap the foot and ankle before the tape is applied, so that the tape doesn't pull at the surface of the skin. Starting at the ball of the foot, wind the underwrap around the foot up to the ankle, leaving the heel uncovered.
 - Underwrap is available at drugstores and sporting goods stores.
 - It is possible to tape an ankle without underwrap, but it is much less comfortable.
- 3 Secure the anchor.** Cut a strip of tape long enough to wrap 1 1/2 times around your ankle. Wind it around your ankle, over the underwrap, to hold the underwrap in place. This is called the anchor, since it anchors the rest of the taping in place.
 - If the ankle has a lot of hair, it can be shaved so that the tape doesn't stick to it.
 - If necessary, use a second piece of tape to make sure the underwrap is secure.
- 4 Create a stirrup.** Place the end of a piece of tape on one side of the anchor. Bring it down under the arch of the foot and back up to the other side of the anchor. Press it lightly to secure it in place.
 - Repeat with two more pieces of tape overlapping the first one to create a sturdy stirrup.
- 5 Create an "x" over the foot.** Place the end of a piece of tape at the ankle bone and run it diagonally over the top of the foot. Bring it down under the arch and toward the inside of the heel. Then bring it around the back of the heel and back up over the foot to create the other part of the "x."
- 6 Make a figure eight.** Place the end of a piece of tape on the outside of the ankle, just above the bone. Run it over the top of the foot at an angle, then bring it under the arch and up the other side of the foot. Next bring it around the ankle and back to the point where you started.
 - Repeat the figure eight. Use another piece of tape to make a second figure eight that overlaps the first one. This will ensure that the wrap is held securely in place and provides enough support for the ankle to heal properly.

**Part
2****Wrapping with an Elastic Cloth Bandage**

- 1 Begin wrapping.** Place the end of the bandage where the toes meet the foot. Begin by wrapping the bandage around the ball of the foot. Hold the end of the bandage against the ball of the foot with one hand, and use the other to bring the tail around the foot from the outside.
 - Keep the bandage tight, but don't wrap it so tight that it decreases blood flow to the foot and toes.
- 2 Work your way toward the ankle.** Wrap the ball of the foot twice, to hold the bandage in place, then begin moving up towards the ankle, being sure to leave at least one-half inch of bandage overlapping the previous layer.
 - Make sure the layers are smooth and even with no unnecessary bulges or lumps. Start over if you need to do the job more neatly.
- 3 Wrap the ankle.** When you get to the ankle, bring the end of the bandage up outside of the foot, over the instep and around the inside of the ankle. Then bring it around the heel, back up over the instep, under the foot, and around the ankle.
 - Continue making this "figure eight" around the ankle several times to fully stabilize the ankle.
- 4 Finish the wrap.** The last wrap should rise several inches above the ankle to help stabilize it.
 - Use the metal fasteners or medical tape to secure the remaining bandage. Excess bandage can also be tucked under the last layer of bandage, provided there's not too much excess.
 - If you are wrapping a child's ankle, there may be too much excess bandage, and it will have to be cut.


**Part
3****Getting Ready to Wrap the Ankle**

- 1 Pick your bandage.** For most people, the best choice of wrapping for a compression wrap is a cloth elastic bandage, sometimes colloquially known as an "ACE bandage," after a common brand of elastic bandage.
 - Any brand of elastic bandage will work. However, wider bandages (between one-and-half and three inches wide) are usually easier to use.
 - Cloth elastic bandages are comfortable, since they're made of stretchy cloth. They are also reusable. (When you're finished, you can wash it and use it again when you need it.)
 - Some bandages come with metal clips for fastening the end of the wrap. If yours does not include metal clips, medical tape can also be used to secure the end of the bandage when the wrap is complete. You can also securely tuck the end of the bandage into the wrap.
- 2 Prepare the bandage.** If your elastic bandage is not already wrapped, roll the bandage into a tight coil.^[5]
 - Compression wraps should fit against the foot and ankle snugly, so it helps to have the cloth wrap coiled tightly from the beginning, making it less likely that you will need to stretch and readjust the bandage as you go.
- 3 Position the bandage.** If you are wrapping your own ankle, it may be easier to position the rolled bandage on the inside of your foot. If you are wrapping someone else's ankle, it may be easier position the rolled bandage on the outside of the foot.
 - In either case, it's crucial that coil face away from the foot, so that the coiled portion of the bandage is on the outside of the foot as you wrap it.
 - For example, if you think of the coiled bandage as a roll of toilet paper and the foot as a wall, the coiled bandage should be in an "under" orientation.^[6]
- 4 Add extra padding, if necessary.** For extra support, you can place a gauze pad on either side of the ankle before wrapping. Horseshoe-shaped padding cut from foam or felt is also used for extra stability in compression

wraps.


Community Q&A

Can I wear a shoe over the wrap?

 It depends on the type of shoe. An open shoe/sandal is more comfortable, in my experience.


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Can I sleep with an ankle wrap on?

 You probably shouldn't, it will reduce blood flow. There is also no purpose to sleeping with it on, it is meant to stabilize your ankle while you are moving around, so not really necessary while you're in bed. Keep it elevated if possible.


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Can I reuse the same wrap for multiple days?

 Yes, although it is not recommended. The longer you leave the wrap on, the more unsanitary it will become. If the wrap gets wet, you will need to replace it, or it may start to develop mold/bacteria. This could cause problems for your healing ankle.


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How do I convince my caretaker to let me put an ankle wrap on my injured ankle?

 If your caretaker lets you go to the doctor, ask the doctor. Your caretaker will probably take the doctor's advice and allow you to wrap your ankle.


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Should I go to a doctor for a possibly sprained ankle?

 You can if you'd like, but it's something that can generally be cared for at home. If it's been a couple of weeks and it's not getting better, see a doctor.


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Can I use the Velcro type of deluxe ACE bandage?

 Yes, instead of the metal fasteners, just use the Velcro to fasten it. Start with one end, with the Velcro up, and follow the steps as said.


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Should I continue to RICE or wrap my ankle if it is still painful and swollen?

 If swelling and pain persist, you will need to see your doctor to ensure that it's not seriously injured. He will advise you on a path of further care.


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How can I make sure the cause is a sprained ankle? What kind of bandage we use for ankle?

 Anything that is comfortable, though I would recommend an elastic wrap or athletic tape or just medical tape thin or thick.


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What if I don't have a bandage wrap? Where can I find one?

 You can get some at any pharmacy or in the first aid section of a grocery/drug store.

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I didn't take good care of my sprained ankle and now the pain has increased. What should I do?

 Visit a doctor, or just immobilize it completely by using crutches, or stay home. It will go away after a few weeks if it's a minor sprain and you stay off of your injured ankle.

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Tips

- Buy more than one ace bandage so you have one to use while the other is being cleaned.

- Take the bandage off twice a day to let blood circulate freely in the area for about 1/2 hour, then re-wrap the bandage.
- Remove the bandage if the area begins to feel numb or tingling. This means that the bandage was wrapped too tightly.
- Be sure to follow the other steps in RICE (rest, ice, and elevation) in addition to the compression wrap.

Things You'll Need

- Ace bandage
- Medical or athletic tape
- Underwrap
- Scissors

Sources and Citations

- Videos provided by www.sportsinjuryclinic.net
1. <https://www.aofas.org/footcaremd/how-to/foot-injury/Pages/How%20to%20Care%20for%20a%20Sprained%20Ankle.aspx>
 2. <http://www.webmd.com/a-to-z-guides/ankle-sprain-overview>

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