

Strains and Sprains

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EXPERT ADVICE

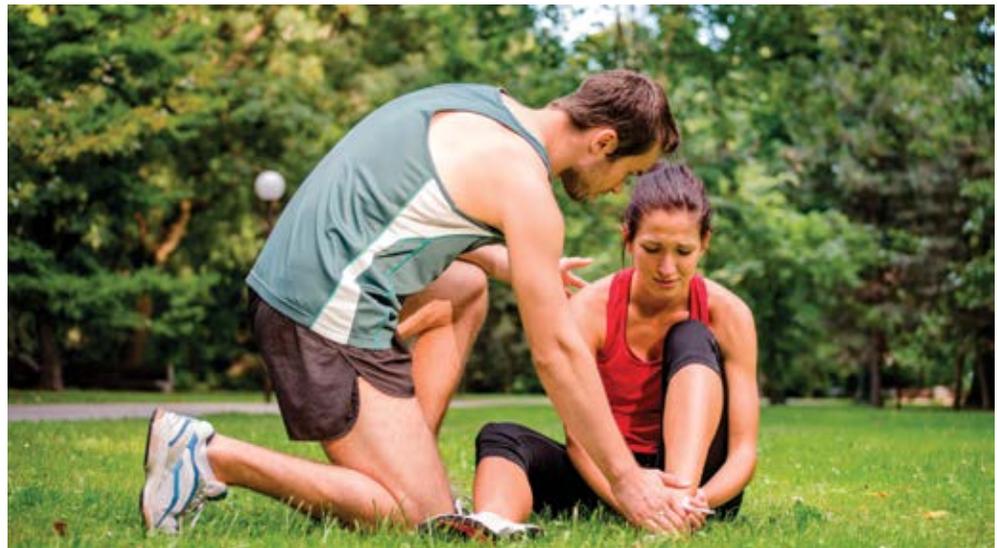
Prevention

To help prevent sprains and strains, you can:

- Avoid exercising or playing sports when tired or in pain.
- Eat a well-balanced diet to keep muscles strong.
- Maintain a healthy weight.
- Wear shoes that fit well.
- Get new shoes if the heel wears down on one side.
- Exercise every day.
- Be in proper physical condition to play a sport.
- Warm up and stretch before playing a sport.
- Wear protective equipment when playing.
- Run on flat surfaces.

Source: National Institute of Arthritis and Musculoskeletal and Skin Diseases (NIAMS)

It's easy to mistake strains and sprains as different words for the same injury, but in fact, they are injuries to entirely different parts of the body.



WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE?

A **strain** is an injury to a muscle or tendon (tissue that attaches muscle to bone), while a **sprain** is an overload and/or tear to a ligament (tissue that connects the end of one bone to another).

WHERE ARE THEY MOST COMMON?

The most common sprains and strains occur in ankles, wrists, knees, and fingers, but they also can occur in the elbow, shoulder, back, and neck.

HOW DO I TREAT THEM?

The best treatment for these injuries is P.R.I.C.E. (see "Sports Injuries Overview"). While severe sprains and strains may require surgery, most will just require a doctor or trainer to establish and monitor a rehabilitation program.

HOW CAN I PREVENT ONE FROM RECURRING?

Physical therapy and off-season training can help strengthen your joints, preventing the recurrence of sprains and strains. As always, wearing proper sports gear—like braces and/or pads—can protect you from injury as well. 🧘

Strains and Sprains: Are They Chronic or Acute?

Many **strains** are chronic—the result of repetitive movement of muscles and tendons over time. Failure to take rest breaks during training can lead to a strain, as can neglecting to stretch after exercising. However, strains can also be acute—caused by a blow, overstretching, or excessive muscle contraction.

A **sprain** is always acute—caused by direct or indirect trauma that knocks a joint out of its normal position, damaging the supporting ligaments. Athletes often get sprains from landing on an outstretched arm, twisting a knee, or jumping up and landing on the side of the foot. Acute ankle sprains are the most common athletic injury. They account for 85% of all ankle injuries.