



Caring for your soft tissue injury (sprain/strain)

The best person to manage your injury is you and this fact sheet discusses things you can do to get better more quickly.

Soft tissue injury is damage to soft tissue such as tendons, muscles and ligaments. Damage to a tendon or muscle is known as a 'strain', and damage to a ligament is known as a 'sprain'.

Injury to soft tissue generally recovers quickly, and often improves dramatically within the first few days. For most soft tissue injuries, you can expect to be back to normal activities within one to six weeks (unless your health provider tells you otherwise). If you are not sure about what you can and can't do, speak with your health provider.

Please note smoking, alcohol or other illicit substances do not assist your recovery.

Managing your pain

- For soft tissue injuries, you can expect your pain to settle down over a short period of time (days to weeks) as healing occurs.
- Using your injured body part as normally as possible will help you get better. So, even though you may be in some pain, try to stay active.
- Pacing your activities can help, so have regular rest breaks and modify activity within pain levels.
- If you need pain relief a short course of medication such as paracetamol may help, otherwise you can consult your doctor or pharmacist for the appropriate type of pain relieving medication.
- If you're worried about your pain or it is not settling quickly, talk to your health provider.

Resuming daily activities

- It helps if you try to get back to your usual daily activities as soon as possible, unless your health provider advises otherwise.
- Prolonged bed-rest delays recovery, and is not recommended.
- Regular activity such as walking or swimming will get your joints and muscles moving. Any usual exercise, as tolerated, is helpful and will assist your recovery.
- Increase your activities steadily and in stages. Set yourself goals that can be achieved over a week such as doing the housework, going out, doing gentle exercises and enjoying hobbies.

- Spread your activities throughout the day, and take time to rest between activities.
- Alternate easier activities with more physically demanding activities.
- Remember it is normal to have good days and not so good days.

When to seek more help

Talk to your health provider if:

- the pain or swelling gets worse
- you don't have any improvement after one week
- you develop any numbness or tingling in your limbs
- you have concerns about your soft tissue injury.

Staying positive

- If you have a positive outlook, and expect that you will get better, this can help you achieve a faster recovery.
- Concentrate on things you can do, instead of things you can't.
- It is important that you stay in charge of your life and remember most people recover quickly.
- If you become upset about your injury, it may help if you speak with a friend, family member or health provider.
- Keeping fit and healthy will help your injury heal.

Helping yourself at work

- Research shows that the sooner you resume all your usual activities, including work (either paid or unpaid) the sooner you'll get better, and the less likely it is that your injury will become a long term problem.
- Your health provider may recommend that you do different tasks from usual at work while you get better.
- Talk with your employer and health provider about ways you can return to work safely.
- Depending on your circumstances, an occupational therapist, physiotherapist, rehabilitation provider or other health provider may assist you to modify your work tasks for a safe return to work.
- Allow for regular changes in body position and movement, to minimise stiffness.
- Keep in touch with your workmates and your workplace. Participate in social activities. This can help you stay in touch with what's going on at work.

“Remember you don't have to be completely pain free to do things at home or to return to work.”