

Emergency Department

Soft tissue injuries

Information for patients



What are the risks?

The term “soft tissue injury” is used to describe injuries to the soft tissues in the body, rather than the harder bones. Examples of soft tissue injuries are:

- bruises
- sprains
- muscle contusions.

Bruises are caused by damage to small blood vessels, which bleed and produce the characteristic purple colour and swelling.

Sprains are caused by tearing the fibres in the ligaments which reinforce joints.

Muscle contusions are caused by tearing muscle fibres.

How are soft tissue injuries treated?

In most cases soft tissue injuries heal without special treatment. However, these are some simple steps which you can take to speed up your recovery. We recommend the following:

Rest – You need to rest to help your injury to recover, but it is still very important that you regularly keep moving the affected part/limb. This helps to avoid it becoming stiff and uncomfortable. However, you should avoid forceful and strenuous activity that might make your injury worse. For example, if you have an upper limb injury (arm, shoulder, elbow, hand) you should avoid lifting or carrying heavy objects, heavy housework, etc. If you have a lower limb injury you should avoid running or jogging until you can walk with no pain.

Ice – An ice pack can be made from a small packet of frozen peas (or similar) which should be wrapped in a damp cloth, to prevent it from damaging your skin, and held on the affected area for 5 -10 minutes. This should be repeated every hour or two, or as often as possible, for the first 48 hours after your injury.

The peas can be refrozen for further use as an ice pack (but please do not eat frozen food if it has thawed and been refrozen). The use of ice packs reduces the pain and makes it easier for you to exercise gently. It will also limit the swelling.

Painkillers – If necessary you should take simple painkillers such as paracetamol and ibuprofen. These can be taken at the same time and should be taken regularly throughout the day. They can be bought cheaply and without a prescription from any chemist and many other shops. You should follow the manufacturer's instructions on the correct dose to take and whether there are any reasons why you may not be able to take them.

Elevation – Raising (elevating) your injured limb will help reduce the swelling. Try to do this as often as possible. You need to make sure that you are raising your injury above the level of your heart. If you have a leg or foot injury, your leg should be rested on a stool. If you have an arm or hand injury you should rest it in a sling or on a cushion. Please ask for our leaflet about tying a sling, to help you to do this at home.

What about compression bandages? – We no longer offer compression bandages for sprains because they appear to have no beneficial effect on how quickly or fully you recover. However, some people do find them comforting to use on sprained limbs; they can be purchased from most pharmacies if you wish to try them.

Most soft tissue injuries heal within two to three weeks. If you still have significant pain or stiffness one week after a finger injury or two or three weeks after other injuries, you should come back to the Emergency Department.

How to contact us

If you have any questions or concerns, please contact:

Emergency Department

John Radcliffe Hospital

Tel: **01865 220 224**

Emergency Department

Horton Hospital

Tel: **01295 229 412**

Alternatively you can contact your GP or NHS 111 (Freephone), for emergency advice.

If you have a specific requirement, need an interpreter, a document in Easy Read, another language, large print, Braille or audio version, please call **01865 221 473** or email **PALSJR@ouh.nhs.uk**

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