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## Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

### 1. What Is The Best Treatment For A Sports Injury?

Sprains, strains, bumps and bruises. They're all a normal part of sports participation. Proper care of these injuries can make the difference between something that is mild or a much longer disabling problem. When you have a sports injury, remember **P.R.I.C.E** is right. **P.R.I.C.E** is the immediate first aid procedure applied to an injury. It stands for **Protection, Rest, Ice, Compression and Elevation/Early Exercise**. Now let's take a closer look at each of these.



**Protection** means guarding the injured area against any stress or motion that could aggravate the injury and delay healing. For example, at first this may mean using crutches if you are limping and unable to walk normally and then later on using a sports brace when you return to activity. Keep in mind that even after the pain is gone and you are back playing, an injury may need support for weeks or even months before it heals completely and regains its strength. It is estimated that complete ligament healing time is from 6 months to one full year!

**Rest** means avoiding activity that could stress and irritate the injured area. Rest does not mean becoming a couch potato however! You should do everything and anything you can to maintain strength, flexibility and cardiovascular endurance but do it

in a way that will not aggravate the injury. Remember, proper exercise is the best treatment for an injury. For example, specific rehabilitation exercises, cardiovascular conditioning and strength training may be excellent ways to speed up recovery and help prepare you to get back in the game.

**Ice** should be applied to the injury- directly to the skin unless you have cold sensitivity.

The application of ice results in blood vessel constriction, reducing bleeding and inflammation in the injured area. Also, it decreases pain and muscle spasm in the injured area. Ice should be placed on the injured part for about 20- 30 minutes. For an area like the hand where there is not much tissue for the cold to penetrate, apply ice for 20 minutes. When treating a back or an area where there is thicker tissue, use ice for 30 minutes. This procedure should be repeated every 20-30 minutes as often as possible. Depending on how severe your injury is, the application of ice may be necessary for 1-3 days. Cold that is applied all the way around the injured area is recommended because it will conform to the body part and provide more uniform penetration.



**Compression** means placing external pressure on an injury in order to decrease bleeding and swelling. An elastic bandage soaked in water can provide effective compression and help conduct cold to the injured area. The bandage should be applied below the level of the injury. For example, when treating an ankle injury start the wrap at the base of the toes. Apply the greatest pressure here and gradually decrease it as the wrap finishes at the level of the lower calf.

**Elevation.** In our experience as athletic trainers, this is the most often neglected part of the PRICE procedure, yet very important to minimize fluid accumulation in the injured area. For injuries involving the arms, legs, hands and feet elevating the injury above the level of the heart will help decrease swelling.

**Early Exercise.** Early controlled motion can prevent stiffness and help maintain flexibility and strength. Also, as muscles contract they help pump swelling from the injured area. For example, for an ankle sprain, gentle pumping of the foot up and down or towel exercises can serve as a very effective treatment procedure.



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## Some Additional Tips:

**Heat.** Once the acute stages of the injury are over and healing is underway, the application of moist heat can be used. Applying heat to the injury will cause the blood vessels to dilate and increase blood flow to the area. This will speed up the healing process and help to reduce muscle spasm and stiffness. If you have any doubt about whether to use ice or begin heat, you should stick with ice. The application of heat too soon after injury can cause increased tissue bleeding and swelling.



**Getting Back to Play.** After the acute injury phase is over, its time to think about getting back out there to play. It is extremely important to restore range of motion, strength and coordination to normal levels. This is a step- by- step process where specific functional exercises are provided. The exercises are gradually made more intense and demanding as sport specific skills are added.

## 2. How Do I Know If I Have An Injury?

Many times, muscle soreness is confused with being an injury. In most cases, muscle soreness is felt a day or two after activity and tends to be a generalized pain. For example, you may notice that you experience soreness in both thighs a day or two after a long run. An *acute injury* is of sudden onset and felt in a specific location. You recall a specific moment when the pain started. For example, you roll your ankle and feel a pop while playing tennis and experience a very specific site of pain on the outside of your ankle. Muscle soreness will usually feel better with gentle exercise; an injury will feel worse when you try to exercise.

There are also *overuse* injuries. These are injuries that result from wear and tear and develop slowly over time. For example, the repetitive nature of throwing a baseball may cause a pitcher to develop shoulder pain (*rotator cuff tendonitis*) or a secretary may develop wrist pain (*carpal tunnel syndrome*) from constant typing. Oftentimes, it is necessary to make a significant modification in exercise or work routine to manage these injuries effectively. It may be necessary to consult your physician for the appropriate diagnosis, treatment and rehabilitation of these injuries.



### 3. When Should I See a Doctor?



There are many times when self-treatment is appropriate. The use of P.R.I.C.E will be all that is necessary for you to make a full recovery from injury. However, it is important to recognize the signs and symptoms of a more serious injury that will require medical attention. Medical care is recommended if:

- ▷ You experience a pop, snap or crack from an injury and severe swelling and pain result.
  
- ▷ There is obvious deformity of a body part following an injury.
  
- ▷ There is loss of normal sensation or feeling in the body part following an injury.
  
- ▷ There is loss of normal function in the injured body part. You may be unable to fully extend your arm or fully bend at the waist.
  
- ▷ You are unable to perform normal daily activities or work responsibilities. You may be unable to climb stairs or dress yourself or you may be unable to carry or lift objects required at work.
  
- ▷ There is persistent pain that does not improve with rest or time.

### 4. How Can I Be Sure To Get The Best Brace?



A very important point to keep in mind is to make sure to get the right brace for your injury. The brace must be appropriate for the function it is to serve and fit properly. For example, when selecting a brace to wear for a sprained ankle, it is very important to make sure that it will provide an appropriate amount of support. Sometimes in an effort to save some money, athletes will buy a simple inexpensive elastic brace. If you use this type of brace to play sports, you will risk additional injury because the elastic will not adequately support the ankle and will stretch when sufficient force is placed on it. There are many different types of knee

braces. Each of them is designed for a specific orthopedic problem. A brace that is used to treat *patellofemoral* pain is very different from a brace that would be used to stabilize a *medial collateral ligament* sprain. Be sure to consult your physician or a sports medicine specialist who is knowledgeable about sports braces. At **Quest Sports**

**Medicine**, our NATA certified athletic trainers provide you with the same braces that we use with the athletes we work with and have found to be the best available.

## **5. When Should I Use An Ankle Or Knee Brace And Will It Weaken The Joint?**



It is a good idea to use a brace to protect a joint that has sustained a sprain when you are returning to activity. When a 2<sup>nd</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> degree sprain occurs, there is tearing of ligament tissue. The ligaments are the hinges that connect the joint and provide stability. It is estimated that complete ligament healing time is from 6 months to 1 year after the initial injury. The brace can allow you to participate in sports while protecting you against re-injury. It is also a good idea to consider the use of ankle braces for injury prevention in high-risk sports such as basketball and volleyball. The incidence of ankle

injuries in these sports is reported to be as high as 25%. In both sports, there is always a risk of jumping up and then landing on someone else's foot when you come down. In basketball, this is compounded by the fact that there is a significant amount of cutting motion.

Does wearing a brace weaken the joint? This is a fairly common misconception among athletes. The purpose of any well-designed ankle or knee brace is to allow normal function and enable the athlete to play at his/her optimal level of performance. A brace is intended to prevent the extremes of motion that could disrupt healing and cause injury. Additionally, the muscles surrounding the joint are working in a normal pattern to stabilize the joint and move the body part. Because normal motion and normal muscle contraction are occurring, there is no risk of a sports brace weakening a joint.

Thank you for your attention. Please contact us for further information or any sports-related treatment.

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