

Education

Wrist Sprain

What is a wrist sprain?

A sprain is an injury to a joint that causes a stretch or tear in a ligament. Ligaments are strong bands of tissue that connect one bone to another. Your wrist is made up of 8 bones that are attached to your hand bones and the bones of your forearm. The wrist joint is covered by a joint capsule and the bones are connected by ligaments.

How does it occur?

A wrist sprain can happen when you fall on your wrist or hand, when you are struck by an object, or during a forced motion of the wrist.

What are the symptoms?

You have pain, swelling, and tenderness in your wrist.

How is it diagnosed?

Your health care provider will review your symptoms and examine your wrist. He or she may order an x-ray to be sure you have not broken any bones in your wrist.

How is it treated?

Treatment may include:

- putting ice packs on your wrist for 20 to 30 minutes every 3 to 4 hours for 2 or 3 days or until the pain goes away
- elevating your wrist on the back of a chair or couch when you are sitting or on a pillow when you are lying down (to help reduce swelling)
- taking an anti-inflammatory or other pain medicine prescribed by your health care provider
- wearing a splint or cast on your wrist to prevent further injury
- doing exercises to help your wrist recover.

Some serious wrist sprains that involve ligament tears may need surgery.

While you are recovering from your injury you will need to change your sport or activity to one that does not make your condition worse. For example, you may need to run instead of playing basketball.

How long will the effects last?

The length of recovery depends on many factors such as your age and health, and if you have had a previous wrist injury. Recovery time also depends on the severity of the wrist sprain. Pain from a wrist sprain may last several weeks or longer. You need to stop doing the activities that cause pain until your wrist has improved. If you continue doing activities that cause pain, your symptoms will return and it will take longer to recover.

When can I return to my normal activities?

Everyone recovers from an injury at a different rate. Return to your activities will be determined by how soon your wrist recovers, not by how many days or weeks it has been since your injury has occurred. In general, the longer you have symptoms before you start treatment, the longer it will take to get better. The goal of rehabilitation is to return you to your normal activities as soon as is safely possible. If you return too soon you may worsen your injury.

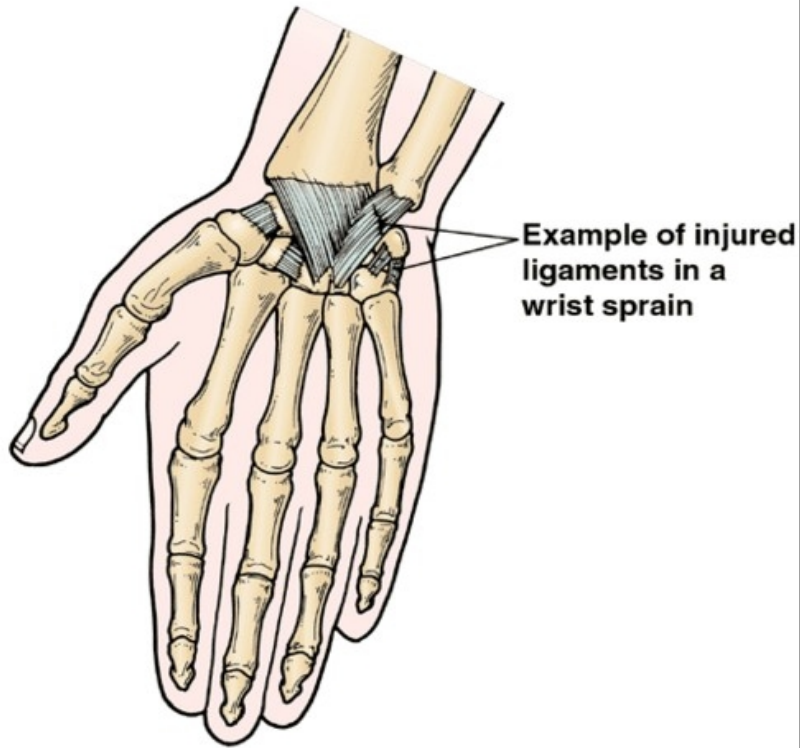
You may return to your activities when the injured wrist can move normally without pain. Your injured wrist, hand, and forearm need to have the same strength as the uninjured side.

How can I prevent a wrist sprain?

A wrist sprain usually occurs during an accident that is not preventable. However, when you are doing activities such as rollerblading be sure to wear protective wrist guards.

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**Example of injured
ligaments in a
wrist sprain**