

Madigan Army Medical Center

Referral Guidelines

Ankle Sprain

Diagnosis/Definition

- Traumatic ankle injury with negative radiological findings.
- Graded I-III with Grade I being ligamentous trauma without laxity, mild pain and swelling.
- Grade II being ligamentous trauma, considerable signs of swelling, pain, loss of motion.
- Grade III being ligamentous laxity and joint instability.

Initial Diagnosis and Management

- History and physical examination.
- Plain films if indicated. (Ottawa rule)
- NSAIDs.
- Elastic wrap or gel cast for compression.
- "Weight bearing as tolerated" with crutches if antalgic gait present.
- Do not prescribe posterior splint or recommend non-weight bearing as these result in increased swelling, pain and risk of Reflex Sympathetic Dystrophy/Complex Regional Pain Syndrome.
- Ice and elevation for 20 min every 2 hours for 72 hours or as long as swelling is present.
- Encourage active range of motion.
- Appropriate restrictions of activity with profiling.

Ongoing Management and Objectives

- Return to full activities is expected for Grade I sprains in 3-4 weeks and for Grade II sprains in 6-8 weeks. The time to return to full activities for Grade III varies and is dependent on orthopedic management choice.
- Patient will require a period of functional rehabilitation between the return of normal strength and motion and return to normal activity. This is normally determined by Physical Therapy.

Indications for Specialty Care Referral

- Physical Therapy: Routine referral for rehabilitation of recurrent Grade I and all Grade II sprains, and/or if the ankle is tender to palpation.
- Orthopedic Surgery referral for all Grade III sprains and any grade if plain radiographs are suggestive of any pathology.

Criteria for Return to Primary Care

Completed specialty care.

Last Review for this Guideline: **May 2010**
Referral Guidelines require review every three years.

Maintained by the Madigan Army Medical Center - Quality Services Division
Clinical Practice and Referral Guidelines Administrator