

Field Health and Survival Tips

Ankle Sprains

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Ankle sprains can occur while participating in field trips out in the Arizona deserts especially with our rocky desert areas. Such injuries occur by stepping in a hole, falling, or jumping on an out stretched ankle. This article will focus on the types of ankle sprains, symptoms of ankle sprains, treatment for ankle sprains, and prevention of ankle sprains.

Ankle sprains are classified as first, second or third degree sprains. The first degree sprain is due to a stretching or minor tearing of the ligaments. The symptoms of the first degree sprain include: minimal pain, mild swelling, mild bruising, and mild point (isolated) tenderness. The person still has a stable joint, full range of motion of the joint without pain, and be able to bear weight. This level of injury is treated with RICE which stands for rest, ice, compression (using an ace bandage), and elevation. The person should be able to return to full activity within 2 to 3 weeks using an ankle support.

A second degree sprain is due to a partial tearing of the ligament. It is characterized by mild to moderate pain, moderate swelling, moderate amount of bruising, slightly limited-painful joint motion, isolated tenderness. The second degree sprain also has mild joint instability plus pain plus the inability to bear weight. This level of injury is treated with RICE, partial weight bearing, an air cast or joint taping, and a gradual return to full activity.

The most serious or third degree sprain is due to a complete tear of the ligament. Symptoms of the third degree sprain include: severe pain, rapid (within 30 minutes) swelling, a larger amount of joint swelling, severe bruising (usually within 30 minutes), severe isolated tenderness, limited or loss of motion of the joint, very unstable joint, and the inability to bear weight. Many experience a “pop” sensation with this sprain. Immediately, the person should apply the treatment of RICE in the field then refer to care by an orthopedic specialist. The treatment of this serious injury often requires surgery, casting, no weight bearing, and rehabilitation. X-rays are often taken to rule out a fracture.

Prevention of ankle sprains is as follows:

Wear laced- hiking boots which extend above the ankle and are in good condition.

Avoid worn tennis shoes or sandals.

Be aware of the terrain for conditions as loose stones or gravel, holes, wet rocks, mossy ground.