

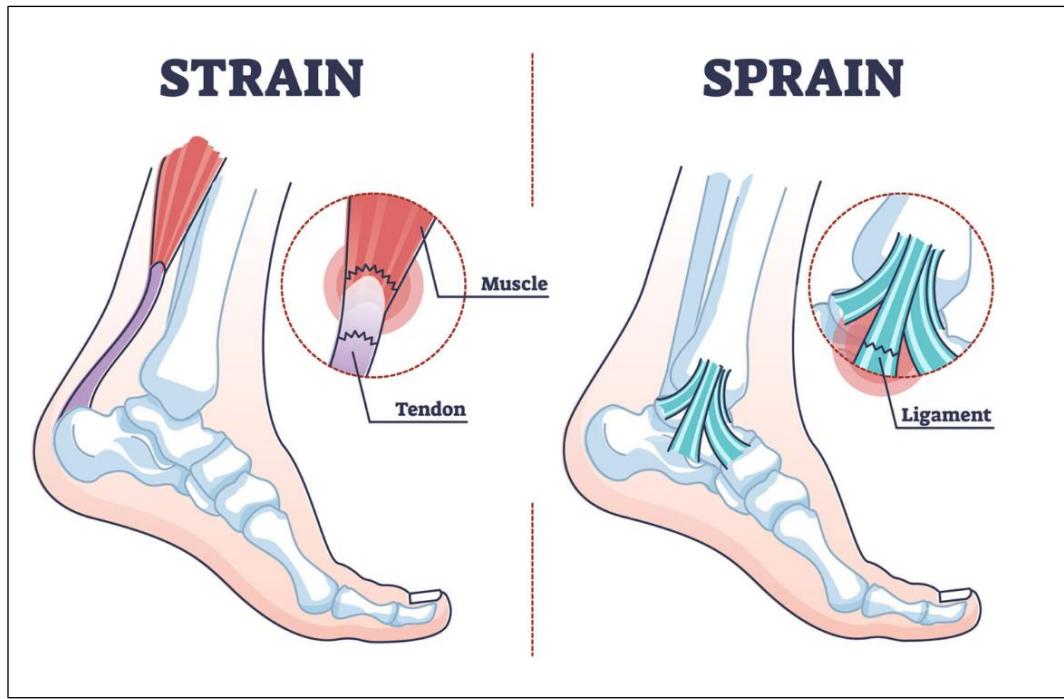
## Sprains & Strains: A Parent Guide for Kids & Teens

### What Are Sprains & Strains?

Sprains and strains are common in active kids and teens, especially with sports or play. They can feel similar, but they are different injuries based on **what tissue is affected and where the injury occurs**.

**Sprain:** Sprains affect **joints**, where bones connect. It is an **injury to a ligament**, the strong bands that connect one bone to another at a joint. It usually happens when a joint twists or is forced beyond its normal range of motion. Common areas of joint sprain are the **ankle, knee, and wrist**.

**Strain:** Strains involve **muscles or tendons** (the tissue that connects muscle to bone). It is an injury to a muscle or tendon (caused by stretching or tearing often from overuse or sudden force). Common areas of strains are the **thigh, calf, shoulder, and back**.



<https://therapia.com.au/pain/sprains-vs-strains/>

### What Are the Symptoms?

Common signs of a sprain or strain may include:

- Pain at the injury site
- Swelling
- Bruising or redness
- Warmth in the injured area
- Difficulty using or moving the injured part normally (e.g., limping or holding an arm still)

Symptoms vary by severity. Mild injuries cause discomfort but still allow some movement; more severe injuries can make use of the area very difficult.

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## How Long Should Symptoms Last?

Mild sprains and strains often improve within a few days to a week with proper home care. Swelling and pain usually improve within **5-7 days**, but it may take **2-4 weeks** for pain to fully resolve, depending on the severity of the injury and the child's activity level. If symptoms aren't aligning with this, contact us for advice.

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## At-Home Care for Sprains & Strains

R.I.C.E. method:

- Rest the injured area; avoid sports and play that stress it.
- Ice the area (wrapped in a towel) for 15–20 minutes, 3–4 times a day for the first 48–72 hours.
- Compression with a snug (not too tight) bandage can help reduce swelling.
- Elevation – keep the injury above heart level when possible to decrease swelling.

Pain relief:

- *Ibuprofen* can help with pain and swelling. Dosing is found on [our website](#) or 

When resting:

- For ankle or leg injuries, try to keep weight off it for a few days.
- For upper body injuries, limit lifting or activity with that arm/hand.
- At your visit we can discuss guidance on gradual return to activity.

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## When Could It Be a Broken Bone Instead?

Bones in children, especially younger ones, can break with falls and twists that might seem like a sprain:

- If the limb looks crooked, bent, or deformed
- If your child can't put any weight on it (like not walking after a leg injury)
- If pain is severe when touched or moved

These could be signs of a fracture and need evaluation. Younger children may be more likely to fracture a bone with injuries that seem like sprains, because their growth plates are weaker.

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## When to call for an appointment

- Your child cannot bear weight on a leg or refuses to use an arm.
- Injury symptoms don't improve after about 5–7 days of home care.
- Pain is severe or progressively worsening
- Signs of infection appear (increasing redness, warmth, fever)
- There's significant swelling or deformity.
- You're unsure if it might be more than a sprain/strain or you're worried.

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## Reasons to Go to a Pediatric Emergency Room (ER)

Seek immediate ER care if:

- The injured area looks deformed or crooked.
- Bone is visible through the skin, or you notice a serious wound.
- There's numbness, tingling ("pins and needles"), or loss of sensation.

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## Tips to Prevent Sprains & Strains During Sports Participation

- Warm up and stretch before physical activities.
- Wear appropriate protective gear for sports.
- Encourage cross-training and rest days to avoid overuse injuries.
- Wear proper shoes and equipment to reduce injury risk.

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Most sprains and strains heal well with proper rest and care. Always trust your instincts as a parent—if something doesn't seem right, contact us for evaluation. We are here for you!