

## Decoding ankle injury terms

Basketball season is in full swing, and with it comes the possibility of ankle injuries. You'll hear doctors and television commentators rattle off different ways to describe an ankle injury. Sprain, strain, fracture and break are common ones. [Marc Leonard, MD](#), an OSF HealthCare podiatrist, says it's important to know what these conditions mean and how to treat and prevent them.

The good news: you don't need to memorize four definitions.

### Sprains and strains

Dr. Leonard says a sprain and a strain generally describe the same thing: when a ligament or tendon is torn or weakened.

"Maybe it's a basketball player who twists their ankle," Dr. Leonard suggests. "It gets a little swollen and bruised. We're able to treat that conservatively with the acronym RICE. Rest, ice, compression and elevation."

### Fractures and breaks

Dr. Leonard says an ankle fracture and an ankle break also generally describe the same thing: a crack in a bone. He often sees this in older adults who have fallen down the stairs or on the ice.

"If there are breaks in multiple bones and we consider it an unstable ankle, then we would fix it surgically," Dr. Leonard says. "The process is surgery, then maybe physical therapy and perhaps a brace."

Dr. Leonard says surgery patients usually go home the same day. A doctor will use screws, staples or both to stabilize the ankle. The person then needs to rest and not put weight on the ankle for six to eight weeks.

### Treatment and prevention

Amid basketball season, here's the take-home advice for when someone suffers an ankle injury: get them off their feet.

"We would advise them to be non-weight bearing. They would use crutches until they can get an X-ray. Then we can decide whether protecting the ankle, physical therapy or surgery may be appropriate," Dr. Leonard says.

Prevention, Dr. Leonard says, is tough, due to all the movement that comes with sports or just a jog around the block. He advises to just be sensible with your movements. If you know your body can't handle a cutting motion that comes with running a basketball play, don't do it. Or, when you're walking, go slow and watch for ice. And when you do get hurt, get care quickly. Don't play through the pain.

Dr. Leonard also says that some people with a history of ankle problems may wear a brace during *any* physical activity, not just when recovering from an injury. But for others, he says a brace isn't necessary.

"Play with a purpose. Be intentional. And hope for the best," Dr. Leonard says matter-of-factly.

### Learn more

Read more about keeping your body in top shape this winter on the [OSF HealthCare website](#).