Soft Tissue Injury to the Lower Limb

Patient Information

The Trust provides free monthly health talks on a variety of medical conditions and treatments. For more information visit www.uhb.nhs.uk/health-talks.htm or call 0121 371 4323.

Further information
Soft tissue injury to the lower limb

A soft tissue injury may involve damage to the muscles, tendons or ligaments. This can result in pain, bruising and swelling to the injured area. Often, pain and discomfort may last up to two months or more from the time of injury but should gradually lessen. The pain and swelling can increase for the first 3-4 days or after increased activity of the injured part, but should be less than it was at first.

An x-ray may or not have been necessary to assess your injury.

The RIE (rest, ice, elevation) regime helps reduce the pain and swelling and allows your injury to heal itself as quickly as possible. You should follow this until the swelling has gone down.

Rest
For the first 48 hours try not to stand on your injured leg. Increase the weight you put on your injured leg as pain allows. Use crutches if provided (these will be supplied if the doctor or physiotherapist prescribed them in the Emergency Department).

Ice
Apply a bag of crushed ice or a bag of frozen peas to ease the pain and swelling. Wrap the ice or peas in a damp towel; place around the injured area for 10-15 minutes with the leg elevated. Repeat 4-6 times a day. Do not apply the ice or peas directly to the skin or they may cause an ice burn.

Elevation
Keep your leg above your hip level with support to your thigh and calf whilst resting.

Unless you were told not to, gentle exercises to prevent stiffness should be done. These should be started after 48 hours or sooner if the pain allows. The joints above, below and around the injured area should be moved as the pain allows aiming for a full range of movement as soon as possible.

If painkillers are recommended, they should be taken regularly to start with, to relieve the pain.

You should avoid sport for at least 3 weeks or until the pain has gone. You should return to sport very gradually. Swimming is recommended as the first form of exercise to try.

Seek medical advice if you develop pins and needles, numbness, discolouration or swelling, which does not settle after elevating the limb.

If the pain or swelling does not settle or if you have any concerns, seek the advice of your GP or return to the Emergency Department.