Sprains and Strains

A sprain is an injury to the ligaments that hold bones together. A strain is an injury to the muscle or muscle tendon caused by stretching, pulling or tearing.

Home care for the first 48 hours after the injury:

- Protect the injured area.
- Rest the injured area. Use crutches as directed.
- Ice – apply ice to the injured area for 20 minutes every 3-4 hours for the first 48 hours after the injury. Wrap the ice in a towel and then apply to the injured area. After 48 hours, applying heat to the area for 10 minutes, 3 times a day can help. (Heat can be applied with a warm, moist cloth, or with a heating pad on low setting.)
- Compress the area by using an ace wrap or splint as directed.
- Elevate the injured area higher than the level of the heart. Keep it elevated as much as possible.

You may give your child pain medication (acetaminophen or ibuprofen) as directed by your child’s doctor. Be sure to follow the package instructions for the amount to give based on your child’s age and weight. Do not give more than 5 doses of acetaminophen or 4 doses of ibuprofen in 24 hours. **Be sure to keep any follow-up appointments with your child’s physician.**

You can help your child prevent sprains and strains by:

- Supervising your child’s activities.
- Having your child do warm-up exercises before participating in sports activities.
- Having your child wear appropriate shoes (correct size/support) and protective gear for activities.
- Making sure your child’s shoes are always tied.

Call your child’s doctor or the Children’s Mercy Hospital Information Line at (816) 234-3188 if:

- There is increased redness or swelling of the injured area.
- There is no feeling in the injured arm or leg.
- The injured arm or leg becomes white or blue.
- The injured arm or leg feels cold.
- Pain is not relieved with pain medication or does not improve after 3 days.
- Your child develops a fever.
- Your child is unable to move his fingers or toes.
- You have any questions or concerns.