Strains & Sprains

What is a strain or sprain?

A strain is an injury caused by overstretching or tearing a muscle or tendon. A sprain is an injury to the ligaments or soft tissues around a joint. Most minor strains and sprains can be treated at home but severe injuries require professional care.

How to treat a sprain / strain: RICE

- **Rest.** Do not put weight on the injured joint for 12-24 hours. Use supports such as crutches, slings, or splints.
- **Ice.** Cold will reduce swelling and pain. Heat will do more harm if applied within the first 48 hours.
- **Compression.** Wrap the injury with an elastic (ACE) bandage to immobilize and protect the area. Do not wrap too tight which could cut off circulation to extremities.
- **Elevation.** Elevate the injured area on pillows while applying ice and when sitting or lying down. Heat may be used after 48-72 hours of cold treatments if swelling is gone.

Helpful Hints:

- Medications such as Aspirin, Ibuprofen, or Aleve help reduce inflammation and pain.
- Seek medical attention when the injured limb or joint is deformed or out of normal position.
- Seek medical attention when skin over the injured site is broken.
- Seek medical attention with signs of nerve damage, i.e. numbness, tingling, immobility.
- Seek medical attention if pain is severe or lasts longer than 24 hours.
- Seek medical attention if swelling does not improve after 48 hours of home treatment.