

## **What to do with an Acute Injury**

Imagine having an ankle sprain, a hamstring strain, or any other injury that happened suddenly while playing a sport or during an accident. Your first instinct usually isn't to seek help. I rarely ever see patients who have these complaints within the first few days of injury. It tends to take them a few days to book an appointment to see a professional about these issues. So what should people do in the meantime?



This is when the R.I.C.E. principle comes into the picture. The R.I.C.E. principle is a very simple principle that basically outlines the immediate actions an individual should carry out once they are injured. This will help limit pain and swelling in the area. What does the acronym stand for?

### **R = Rest**

The moment you feel you've hurt yourself playing a sport or doing any activity, stop! Stop and take a break. Do not continue playing or walking or running. Continuing the activity can cause more pain, more swelling, and may make the injury worse. The rest phase may last a few hours to a few days, depending on the extent of the injury.



### **I = Ice**

Icing is a great way to "cool off" aggravated tissue. It helps reduce the pain sensation, and prevents more swelling from developing in the area of injury. Remember to wrap a towel

around the ice pack you are using before placing it on your skin. Direct contact between skin and ice may cause further issues down the line! Ice can be used for 10-15 minutes at a time. It can be used every couple hours if necessary. Ice is usually only indicated in the first few days of injury. Afterwards, evidence shows ice can slow the healing process. It is a quick way to help with pain, but it is important to not become reliant on it!



**C = Compression**

Compression is the use of an elastic bandage wrapped around the area of injury. This helps prevent swelling from occurring. Although swelling has some benefits, too much swelling can delay the healing process. The body sends too many resources to the area, slowing down the healing process because there is just too much going on at the site of injury.

If you are using compression, make sure not to wrap too tightly. This is because too tight of a compression can completely cut off circulation, which is also detrimental to tissues. If your fingers or toes start to turn white or feel numb, this is an indication your compression is too tight!



### **E = Elevation**

Along with resting, elevation of an injured limb is the easiest task to accomplish. While lying or sitting, I instruct patients to place a pillow or two under their heel or arm. This puts limb into an inclined position, allowing gravity to push fluid towards the heart.



### **When to Use the R.I.C.E. Principle**

An acronym used to help people remember the signs and symptoms of an acute injury is S.H.A.R.P. If you are injured and your body responds to injury in this way, the R.I.C.E. principle will more often than not help with your injury until you have the opportunity to see a healthcare professional.

- S = swelling
- H = heat/warmth
- A = altered function
- R = redness
- P = pain



### **Keep in Mind...**

Although most likely a simple sprain or strain, any acute injury should be assessed by a healthcare professional to rule out a fracture or other serious injuries. An untreated fracture can cause serious dysfunction and long term affects, which will be much harder to treat down the line. Email us at [informphysio12@gmail.com](mailto:informphysio12@gmail.com) if you would like to be assessed by a professional for your injury.