

My Ankle Hurts Higher Up the Leg

Understanding High Ankle (Syndesmotic) Sprains

What Is Causing High Ankle Sprain Pain?

A high ankle sprain injures the syndesmosis — the strong ligaments connecting the two lower leg bones (tibia and fibula) just above the ankle joint. Unlike a typical ankle sprain, this happens when the foot is forced to twist outward while planted, and it generally takes longer to heal than a standard sprain.

What Does It Feel Like?

- Pain higher up the ankle or lower leg than a typical sprain
- Pain that worsens when the foot is rotated outward or the calf is squeezed
- Significant swelling above the ankle joint
- Difficulty pushing off the foot while walking
- A sense of deep, aching pressure rather than a sharp, localized pain

What Causes It?

- Sports involving cutting, twisting, or collisions (football, hockey, skiing)
- A planted foot combined with forced outward (external) rotation
- Sudden forceful upward bending of the ankle (hyperdorsiflexion)
- Direct contact injuries in contact sports

What Makes It Worse?

- Attempting to push off or run before the ligaments have healed
- Inadequate bracing or immobilization early in recovery
- Returning to sport before joint stability is fully restored
- Twisting or pivoting motions

When Should I Be Concerned?

- Complete inability to bear weight
- Significant instability or a sense the ankle bones are shifting
- Suspected accompanying fracture — this needs imaging to confirm
- Pain that isn't improving after several weeks of care

The Good News

With an accurate diagnosis and a carefully progressed physical therapy program — moving from protection, to restoring motion, to rebuilding strength and sport-specific control — most high ankle sprains heal well without surgery.

Recovery typically takes **6 to 12 weeks**, noticeably longer than a standard lateral ankle sprain, so patience with the process really matters here.

This information is for general educational purposes only and is not a substitute for a professional evaluation. Call us today — we have immediate openings with no waitlist.

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