

# Acute Inflammation



American College of  
Foot and Ankle Surgeons®

## What Is Acute Inflammation?

Inflammation is the body's normal protective response to an injury, irritation, or surgery. This natural "defense" process brings increased blood flow to the area, resulting in an accumulation of fluid. As the body mounts this protective response, the symptoms of inflammation develop. These include:

- Swelling
- Pain
- Increased warmth and redness of the skin

Inflammation can be acute or chronic. When it is acute, it occurs as an immediate response to trauma (an injury or surgery), usually within two hours. When it is chronic, the inflammation reflects an ongoing response to a longer-term medical condition, such as arthritis.

Although inflammation can be caused by an infection, they are not the same and are treated differently. Your foot and ankle surgeon can best determine the cause of your inflamed tissue.

## Treatment

To reduce inflammation and the resulting swelling and pain, injured tissue needs to be properly treated. The earlier you start treatment, the better.

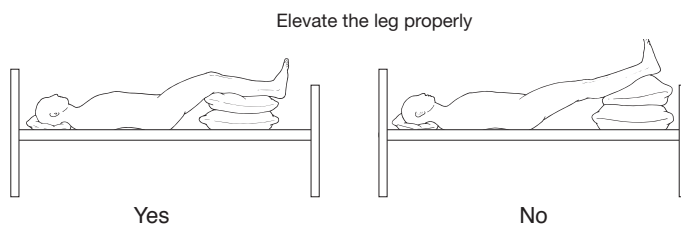
Initial treatment for acute inflammation in the foot or ankle consists of RICE therapy:

**Rest:** Stay off the foot or ankle. Walking may cause further injury.

**Ice:** Apply an ice pack to the injured area, placing a thin towel between the ice and the skin. Use ice for 20 minutes and then wait at least 40 minutes before icing again.

**Compression:** An elastic wrap should be used to control swelling.

**Elevation:** The foot or ankle should be raised slightly above the level of your heart to reduce swelling.



In addition to the above measures, your foot and ankle surgeon may prescribe a nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drug (NSAID), such as ibuprofen, or another type of medication.

## If Pain Persists or Becomes Worse

The symptoms of inflammation typically improve within two or three days. If your pain and discomfort do not improve after three days, call your doctor or go to an emergency room to determine whether a more serious problem exists.

As with any medical problem, it's important that you follow your doctor's instructions carefully regarding your injury or postoperative care. ■

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