

## Claremont-Mudd-Scripps Sports Medicine FAQs

### Frequently Asked Questions

**Question:** What's the difference between a sprain, a strain, and a tear when I have an injury?

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**Answer:** A sprain is an injury to a ligament, which connect bones to other bones and provide stability at a given joint. Strains are injuries to a muscle, which of course create (or prevent) movement at the joints. Injuries to these structures are described by grades of severity; typically grades 1, 2, and 3. With a grade 1 (mild) sprain or strain, there will be little or no structural damage, little or no swelling at the injury site, and minimal loss of function.<sup>1, 2</sup> A grade 2 (moderate) sprain or strain is a partial disruption or tear of the tissues, while the structure will remain partially functional.<sup>1, 2</sup> There will be moderate pain and swelling in the area of injury, with some discoloration, and moderate loss of strength. A grade 3 (severe) sprain or strain indicates a full or complete rupture (tear) of the structure. There may be significant pain, swelling, and discoloration around the injury site with significant loss of strength, function, and stability.<sup>1, 2</sup> It is not uncommon to injure more than one ligament or suffer a sprain and a strain simultaneously, as is frequently seen with ankle or knee injuries, for example.

1. Prentice WE. *Arnheim's Principles of Athletic Training*. 11th ed. Boston: McGraw-Hill; 1997.
2. Magee DJ. *Orthopedic Physical Assessment*. 3rd ed. Philadelphia, PA: WB Saunders Company; 1997.

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