What is a Soft Tissue Injury?
Soft tissue injuries is a term used for injuries to muscles, tendons and ligaments (not bone). When soft tissues are injured there is usually pain, tenderness, swelling and bruising. Quick and appropriate action is very important for recovery so the first 24 hours are crucial.

When soft tissues are injured you can develop bruises which are caused by damage to the small blood vessels. Swelling and increased pressure can cause pain and muscle spasm. This is normal and all part of the healing process but excessive swelling can slow this down.

What to expect
You can expect full recovery from most soft tissue injuries between one to six weeks. The length of time depends on your age, general health and the severity of the injury.

Is it safe to exercise?
Gentle exercises and stretching are very important and should begin immediately to minimise stiffness. Mild pain should be expected, however significant pain should be avoided. Unless you have been told otherwise, after the first few days slowly increase your activity levels as tolerated.

How can you help yourself?
To reduce the amount of bleeding and swelling and maximise your recovery you can help yourself by following the P.R.I.C.E principle and avoiding H.A.R.M. These are most important in the 42 to 78 hours post injury.
P.R.I.C.E
Following the steps below will help aid a quicker recovery:

**Protection**
Prevent further injury, limiting weight bearing or immobilising with a splint or a sling.

**Rest**
To help your injury recover. However it is still very important to regularly keep moving the affected area to prevent any stiffness developing.

**Ice**
Reduce the swelling and bleeding, helping reduce pain. Wrap an ice pack or anything from the freezer e.g. a bag of peas in a damp towel (do not apply ice directly to your skin) apply to area for 10-20 minutes, monitor skin condition and do not leave more than 20 minutes. Repeat every two hours for the first 24 hours after this gradually reduce frequency. **Do not try ice if you have any circulatory/ vascular conditions or reduced sensation/ numbness.**

**Compression**
To reduce swelling and bleeding and provide support. Use a compression bandage (tubigrip is good) and apply it to the injured area, making sure the bandage is both below and above the injury. The bandage should not restrict circulation or cause additional pain.

**Elevation**
Reduce the swelling further by encouraging the swelling to drain. If you have a lower limb injury, raise the leg above hip level. If you have an upper limb injury, make sure this is raised above your heart.

H.A.R.M
Things to avoid in the initial 72 hours after injury to speed up your recovery are:

**Heat**
Increases blood flow and swelling

**Alcohol**
Increases blood flow and swelling, and can make you less aware of aggravating your injury.

**Re-injury**
Protect your joint until it has healed adequately and avoid excessive exercise.

**Massage**
Vigorous massage increases swelling and bleeding. Direct massage to the injured area may aggravate the damaged tissues and is normally best avoided for the first 72 hours.

**Pain relief**
In most cases Paracetamol is sufficient. 72 hours post injury, anti-inflammatory medications such as Ibuprofen may help, but these may not suitable for some people. If in doubt ask your doctor or Pharmacist.