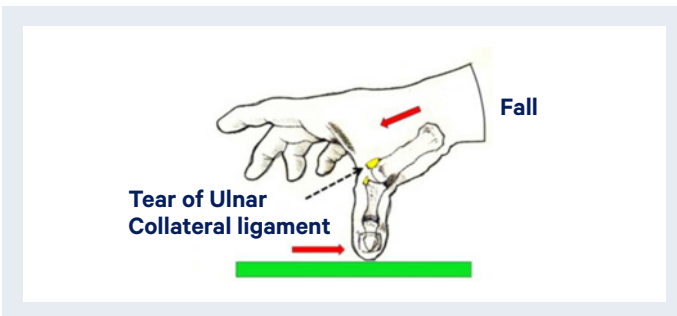


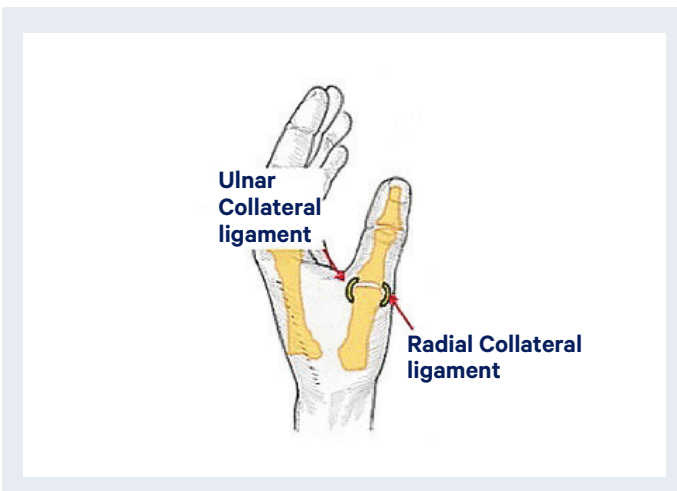
## Collateral Ligament Injury of the Thumb (Skiers or Gamekeepers thumb)

### WHAT IS A COLLATERAL LIGAMENT INJURY AND HOW DOES IT HAPPEN?

Ligaments are strong bands of tissue that hold a joint in place and keep it stable. There are two main ligaments at the middle joint of thumb, the ulnar and the radial collateral ligaments. These ligaments are important for a strong pinch and grasp.



These ligaments can be injured if a sudden strong force pulls the thumb away from the palm of the hand. This most often happens in sports and falls. The ulnar collateral ligament is the most commonly injured.



### HOW IS A COLLATERAL LIGAMENT SPRAIN TREATED?

#### Hand Therapy

If the thumb ligament is only partially torn, it will usually repair if your thumb is placed in a hard splint or cast.

Your hand therapist will assess your thumb and treatment may include

- A splint is made to fit your thumb, this prevents movement and keeps the injured thumb joint in the correct position while the ligament heals.
- You may be encouraged to apply cold (ice) packs for 10 to 15 minutes three to four times a day to the affected area, to help with pain and swelling.

- If necessary pain medications such as anti-inflammatory medicine may be recommended. Talk to your GP, pharmacist or hand therapist for further advice.
- Ultrasound treatment, massage, soft splints and exercises to help the ligament heal and restore movement and strength to your thumb.
- Advice and supports to help you return to your sport.



#### Surgery

If the ligament has completely torn (known as a rupture) you may require surgery. You may be sent for a scan to check for this.

The surgeon will assess your thumb and decide if you need an operation. The goal of surgery is to make the thumb stable and restore normal movement.

After surgery you will be placed in a thumb and wrist cast for four weeks and then you may be referred to a hand therapist to be fitted with a hard thumb splint for a further two weeks. Your hand therapist will show you protected exercises and guide your rehabilitation.

### WHAT CAN I EXPECT FROM MY REHABILITATION?

You may need to wear the splint all the time for the first three to four weeks after the injury. Your hand therapist will talk to you about this.

The time the ligament takes to heal depends on how severe your ligament injury is. We grade the injuries into 3 types:

- Grade 1 sprains usually need around 6 to 8 weeks to repair for heavier pinch and gripping activities.
- Grade 2 sprains usually need 6 to 10 weeks to repair.
- Grade 3 sprains often need 12 to 16 weeks to heal, although this type may need surgery.



# Merivale Hand Clinic

PHYSIOTHERAPISTS - OCCUPATIONAL THERAPISTS

## Collateral Ligament Injury of the Thumb (Skiers or Gamekeepers thumb)

### Do

- Wear your splint.
- Keep your hand elevated if there is swelling in your thumb, this will help it heal.
- Follow your hand therapists' instructions about exercises and using your hand.
- Avoid daily tasks that involve any strong pinching or gripping.

### Do Not

- Remove your splint without guidance from your hand therapist.

### WHAT SHOULD I LOOK OUT FOR?

- Tell your hand therapist if your splint or plaster is too tight or uncomfortable, your splint becomes loose or if it is rubbing on your skin or if you have any numbness or pins and needles.
- If your thumb or hand becomes red, swollen and painful you should stop your exercises and book an appointment to see your hand therapist. Elevation and ice may be helpful to reduce swelling.
- If things are getting worse book an appointment to see your hand therapist.

### WHAT WILL HAPPEN IF I DO NOT HAVE TREATMENT?

If you do not have treatment your thumb joint could become unstable which may lead to arthritis and you may have long term difficulty with pinching and gripping.

### CONTACT DETAILS AND REFERENCES

Your hand therapist is\_\_\_\_\_

Merivale Hand Clinic (03) 3559775

AAOS American Academy of Orthopaedic Surgeons

Baylor Scott & White [www.sw.org](http://www.sw.org)

The Hand Center of Western Massachusetts [www.handctr.com](http://www.handctr.com)

eOrthopod [www.orthogate.org/patient\\_education](http://www.orthogate.org/patient_education)

[myhand.com.au](http://myhand.com.au)