

Ulnar Collateral Ligament Injury of the Thumb

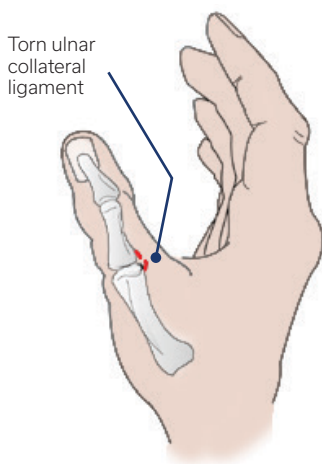


“Working with a knowledgeable hand therapist can make the difference between success and failure in complex hand surgical cases. The therapist extends the continuum of our care, as well as functioning as coach and trainer for our patients.”

MARYBETH EZAKI, MD, PAST PRESIDENT, AMERICAN SOCIETY FOR SURGERY OF THE HAND

What is a sprain or injury to the UCL in the thumb?

The UCL, or ulnar collateral ligament, is located in the middle thumb joint, and provides support to the thumb during grip and pinch. It is the most common ligament injury in the thumb. This injury is known as skier’s or gamekeeper’s thumb.



What causes a UCL injury in the thumb?

Most often, injuries occur during sport or recreational activities, such as skiing, football, biking and soccer. Any extreme force to the thumb in the opposite direction can cause a sprain or strain, but injuries can also occur as a result of a fall, or jamming the thumb.



Holding a pole during a fall can cause a skier’s thumb injury.

What are the symptoms of a UCL injury in the thumb?

Pain and swelling in the middle joint of the thumb can occur right after injury, with possible bruising and stiffness in the joint. With this injury, activities such as holding a drinking glass or writing may be difficult. Weakness may be a symptom as well, with a decreased ability to grip or pinch any object with the thumb and hand.

What is the treatment for a UCL injury in the thumb?

The doctor will likely order an X-ray of the thumb to rule out a broken bone. The doctor will also test the stability of the thumb with gentle pressure from each side, and compare this to the other thumb. If there is a sprain to the UCL of the thumb, the physician may prescribe a custom orthosis to rest the joint and ligament for a period of time. If the ligament is torn or ruptured, the doctor may recommend surgery to repair the ligament.

What can a hand therapist do for me?

A therapist can make a custom orthosis to rest the thumb ligament as it heals. While the ligament is healing, the therapist will provide gentle exercises for the other joints of the hand. After the ligament has healed, the therapist will progress exercises to increase function and strength in the hand and thumb.



Custom orthosis to protect UCL injury to the thumb