



Gamekeeper's Thumb

Definition: Gamekeeper's thumb is a tear of the ligament that stabilizes the base of the thumb. The ligament is called the ulnar collateral ligament (UCL) and it stabilizes the metacarpalphalangeal (MCP) joint of the thumb located in the web space between the thumb and index finger.

Common Terms: Gamekeeper's thumb; skier's thumb; goal keeper's thumb

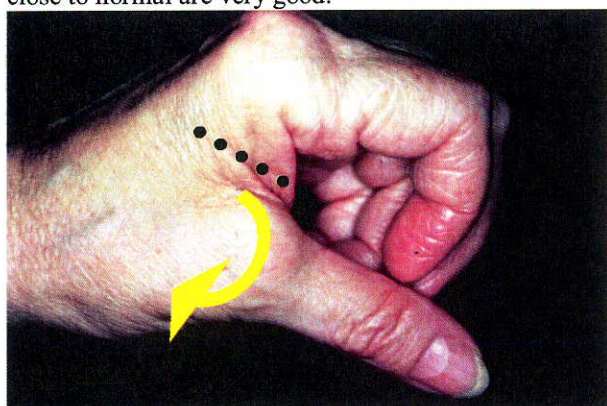
Typical Mechanism of Injury: This injury is caused by a force directed on the thumb that pulls the thumb away from the index finger, basically stretching open the web space. A fall on the hand with the thumb stretched out is a common mechanism. Another common mechanism is a skier falling with the thumb wrapped around the ski pole. Athletes may also get these injuries trying to stop a ball with a bare hand.

Common Signs and Symptoms: There may be pain, swelling and bruising at the base of the thumb. There may be instability (looseness) as well. Pinching the thumb and fingers will be hard because of pain and weakness. There may even be a knot that can be seen or felt near the base of the thumb that is a bundled up torn ligament.

Common Treatment: Ice is applied early to decrease pain and swelling. If the ligament is not completely torn immobilization in a cast for several weeks will allow healing. Once healing has begun, supervised rehabilitation will be required to assure an optimal recovery. This will consist of range of motion and other exercises. Bracing for an extended period of time may be necessary for added protection of the area. A complete tear of the ligament will likely require surgery to repair. This will be followed with a cast and then rehabilitation.

Prevention: Skiers and athletes should be taught proper ways to fall to avoid a tear to this ligament. Special poles have been developed to help prevent this injury and letting go of the poles will also help prevent injury.

Expectations: With appropriate early treatment and protection a full recovery is usually expected, although this may take several months. Even with optimal healing some individuals may have some mild instability and develop early arthritis and possible stiffness of the thumb. If surgery is performed in a timely manner, the odds of returning close to normal are very good.



© 2003 Primal Pictures Ltd.

DEPARTMENT OF ORTHOPAEDICS & SPORTS MEDICINE

Carol & Frank Morsani Center for Advanced Health Care * 13330 USF Laurel Dr * Tampa, Florida 33612

* (813) 396-9625 * FAX (813) 396-9195 * www.health.usf.edu

usfORTHO.com