

Ulnar Collateral Ligament Tear

Ulnar collateral ligament tears occur when one of the ligaments on the inside part of the elbow become torn. The ulnar ligament is a structure that works to maintain a normal relationship between the ulna and the humerus. This ligament is commonly injured in various types of throwing sports or after elbow surgery or dislocation. It can occur suddenly from trauma e.g. when planting the arm in gymnastics. In most cases, this is a severe sports injury. The ligament is rarely stressed from normal daily activities. It works to prevent the elbow from gapping apart on the outside. When the ligament is torn, sometimes it doesn't heal or it might heal in a loose position.

Sometimes the ligament may avulse, so the ligament stays intact but it pulls away a small piece of bone from the medial epicondyle of the elbow.

Ulnar Collateral Ligament Tear Anatomy

The ulnar collateral ligament (sometimes called the medial collateral ligament) joins the ulnar bone to the humerus. The ulnar is one of two forearm bones, the other being the radius. The humerus is the upper arm bone. The articulation between these bones is the elbow joint. The ligaments at each side (ulnar collateral and radial collateral) support and brace the side of the elbow, preventing lateral sheering or gapping of the elbow, and promoting stability to the elbow.

How to Treat an Ulnar Collateral Ligament Tear:

1. Anti-Inflammatory Medication

A non-steroidal anti-inflammatory medication can help to relieve pain and inflammation in the affected area. If needed, you might be prescribed a stronger pain reliever to help with the pain in the torn ligament. Medication should be considered for the short term.

2. Ice

Apply ice to the affected area for 5-10 minutes at a time three to five times per day to help with inflammation and pain. Make sure to wrap the ice in a thin towel to prevent an ice burn from occurring on your skin.

3. Rest

You need to stop participating in the activity or sport that caused the injury in the first place. Allow the area the time it needs to heal. Do not go back to sport until advised by your doctor or therapist as this tear might take some weeks to heal.

4. Bracing / Cast

During the first 24-72 hours, a brace or cast might be applied to give the ligament the time required to begin healing and eliminate any chance of further injury occurring in the site. Casts are not always used, but it depends on the opinion of the doctor and the pain levels experienced by the patient.

Tips:

- When returning to sport, it is a good idea to use an elbow support or elbow brace to add extra support to the elbow. This is not a long term strategy, but useful in the short term while you are building strength to the elbow.
- Rehabilitation will help you to improve strength and endurance while proper throwing mechanics are initiated. A lack of rehabilitation might lead to instability in the elbow, making further injuries more likely.



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