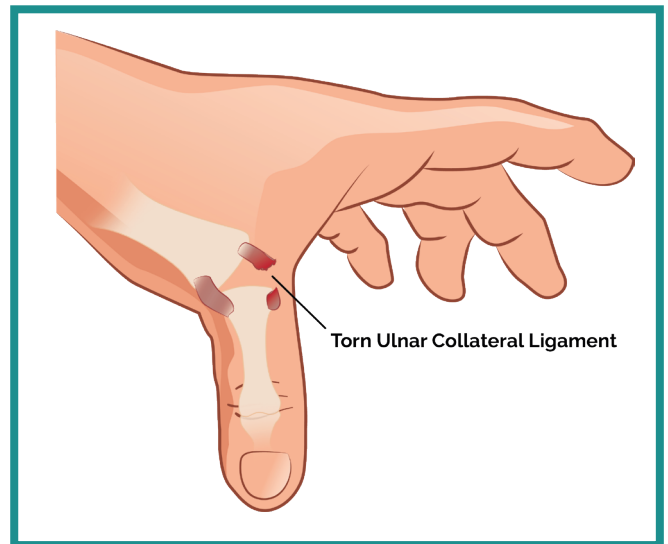


FACT SHEET

WHAT IS A THUMB SPRAIN?

A sprain is an injury to a ligament. Ligaments are connective tissue which connect bone to bone across a joint, to give the joint stability. Thumb sprains result from the thumb being forced into an extreme position. They are a common sports injury.

The thumb will usually swell, especially on the side of the injured ligament. It is usually very painful to move and is particularly painful when attempting to grip with the thumb. The most commonly injured ligament is the ulnar collateral ligament, which results from the thumb being forced outwards away from the hand. The radial collateral ligament may also be injured but this is less common.



Ulnar Collateral Ligament Injury

TREATMENT

It is common for x-rays to appear normal, as ligaments cannot be seen on x-ray, however an x-ray is helpful to rule out a fracture.

A hand therapist or doctor will assess how unstable the injured joint is, to determine if the ligament is partially or completely torn. Partial tears are treated in a custom-made splint, which prevents tension on the injured ligament while it heals. A custom-made thermoplastic splint is lighter and much less bulky than a plaster and ensures a far better fit than commercial products. The splint is usually required for 4-6 weeks, followed by gradual strengthening.

Where a complete ligament tear is suspected an MRI may be recommended. Complete tears are most commonly treated with surgery to repair the torn ligament, however if the remaining ligament is of poor quality, a ligament reconstruction may be required.



Custom-made Thermoplastic Splint