

Argus Orthopaedic Zone

Thumb Sprain

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Transforming patient information into patient understanding.

This fairly common condition goes by several names. Skiers thumb is a common term.

You are skiing down a hill and lose your balance. In clutching your pole, it puts an outward stress on the thumb tearing a ligament. It can happen in countless other ways too, if you fall on your hand.

Every Orthopaedic Surgeon also knows the condition by the term gamekeeper's thumb. Never mind why! It has to do with rabbits!

The large thumb ligament can be partly or completely torn.

Signs and Symptoms

This large ligament is a hinge to keep your thumb joint in place. When it tears you will find difficulty in pinching or grasping objects between your thumb and index finger. Also -

- Pain at the base of the thumb
- Bruising
- Tenderness
- Swelling.

When To Call

I like to see these sooner than later because good early treatment gives the best results. If the ligament does not heal properly due to delay, it is hard to treat a floppy thumb.

Evaluation and Treatment

Careful exam of the hand and plain x-rays are the first step.

If I feel the thumb ligaments are only partly torn and the thumb is not too loose, I probably will use a cast for 4 - 6 weeks.

A period of splinting may be needed after the cast comes off. Some patients might require hand physical therapy to improve.

Surgery

When the thumb is really loose or floppy indicating a complete tear, surgery is the best treatment. It secures the ligament back to bone and then requires the same 4 - 6 weeks in a cast.

Physical therapy may be needed to restore strength and range of motion. Full healing of this can take several months (not 6 weeks as most of my patients hope!).

Advice

- If you ski, take the straps off your poles so your thumb won't get caught.
- Don't be a gamekeeper in England.
- Don't stick your thumb out when you fall!

Office Website and Argus Orthopaedic Zone Archive

For much more musculoskeletal and Orthopaedic Surgery information check out the office website www.orthopodsurgeon.com which also takes you to Your Orthopaedic Connection. It contains a huge amount of useful information.

In addition the Website has the Archive of every article I have written for you in Shepherd Argus. All the articles are listed from most recent back to the first one! Check it out for interesting articles you may have missed.

I appreciate you loyal readers and welcome all newcomers!

Our goal is simple - To help people return to more pain free, functional lives. I specialize in you.

Good health. Good life. All the best to you.

Be well.

Dr. Haverbush