

Argus Orthopaedic Zone

Hand and Wrist Ligaments are Complicated

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Transforming patient information into patient understanding.

All of us take our body parts for granted, which is natural. No one (I hope!) sits around thinking about their hand and wrist ligaments unless there is a problem with them.

When there is a problem or injury it becomes a problem for both my patient and me.

Ligaments

Some of my patients tend to use the terms ligament and tendon somewhat interchangeably. Let me try to clarify this before we go on.

The ligament is a tough fibrous structure that connects two bones (in most cases) across a joint. They are not an extension of muscles like tendons.

Ligaments are Nice

Ligaments are sort of like model children. They behave, don't act up, keep quiet; you get the idea. Ligaments don't usually give us trouble unless we do something to injure them.

Tendons on the other hand act up frequently and get inflamed and painful. Tendinitis can be from over use, but half the time we have no clue what happened to cause tendinitis.

Ligaments Are Everywhere

There are so many ligaments it is unbelievable and they come in all shapes and sizes. Some are tiny and others are very large like the knee's medial collateral ligament and cruciate ligaments. Ligaments are present from the head to the outer bones of the toe.

I have to take care of the ones from the top of the neck to the toes and everything in between.

Injured Ligaments

Ligaments can be injured by stretching (sprain), tearing (ruptured) or being cut as in a laceration.

Today we are concentrating on the hand and wrist ligaments and there are a bunch.

As I already said, ligaments mostly behave unless we hurt them.

Doctors classify ligament sprains as grade one, two and three. One is mild, two moderate and three is severe or completely torn.

Diagnosis In The Hand And Wrist

Of course, I find out what happened (history) and then carefully examine the injured part. Plain x-rays are standard, because without them a fracture can be missed. There are 8 wrist bones compactly held together in two rows. Little ligaments are going every which way.

Sometimes it can be very difficult to diagnose certain ligament injuries in the wrist especially. I use MRI on occasion, but not always for hand and wrist diagnosis.

The key to proper treatment is correct diagnosis.

Conservative Treatment

Grade one and two ligament injuries are mostly treated by splinting for a variable period of time. I have to keep track of them closely, because it might appear to be grade one or two initially and then actually be a grade three on further testing. I don't want to miss this.

Surgery

The dreaded S word. It gets way too complicated to go into detail here. However, there are certain ligament injuries that I see that have to be operated if the person is to receive proper treatment. Ligament repairs in the hand and wrist are mostly done open by suturing. Pins are sometimes used to stabilize the joint.

Rehabilitation

The Occupational Therapist is extremely important in many hand and wrist injuries. I use O T extensively to try to restore function and lessen pain in the injured hand and wrist. This is a good example of a team approach in trying to achieve the best result possible.

Office Website and Argus Orthopaedic Archive

For a tremendous amount of 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 Orthopaedic and musculoskeletal 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 all of you loyal readers and patients, present and future 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

