

Argus Orthopaedic Zone

Medial and Lateral Knee Ligament Injuries - Treatment

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Transforming patient information into patient understanding.

Last week I gave you a fairly complete overview of what medial and lateral knee ligaments injuries are. This did not include ACL ligament injuries as they are a problem all to themselves and are quite different from the so called collateral ligaments.

This week I intend to cover treatment of Medial Collateral Ligament (MCL) and Lateral Collateral Ligament (LCL) injuries.

When To Call

If your knee is swollen and painful following an injury it is important to have it properly evaluated by me or someone else who is very knowledgeable about knee ligaments.

You will not be able to decide if the problem is minor and requires only simple treatment. It could be a major ligament injury that requires treatment possibly requiring surgery. You, the patient, cannot determine that.

If ligament injuries are not treated properly and promptly, they can lead to chronic instability and many more problems later.

How I Treat It

If you will recall last week I divided the ligament injuries into grades, one, two and three.

After prompt, thorough evaluation, treatment goes something like this.

Mild

If I think you sprained your knee, only mildly injuring the ligaments

- Elastic knee sleeve or wrap
- Elevate mostly for 2 - 3 days
- Ice for 15 minutes 4 times per day
- Motrin, Advil or similar
- Possibly crutches for a few days.

Moderate

- Wrap around knee immobilizer, straight, 20 - 24 inches in length
- Crutches and partial weight for sure
- Elevation, ice and Motrin

- A longer period of rest and immobilization
- Possibly a brace with hinges
- Rehab program of exercises to strengthen and restore range of movement to the knee.

Severe

Now we get into a gray area of treatment. You (the patient) should not take these injuries lightly. Patients cannot figure this out on their own.

If the tear is severe and the knee is very wobbly (unstable, loose) surgery might be the answer. But not all grade three collateral ligament injuries will require surgery. After prompt (hopefully!), thorough exam, plain x-rays and probably an MRI, I can make the decision to treat conservatively or operate.

Actually we treat more of these collateral ligament injuries conservatively than we use to. Either way it can take months to recover and it is always a season ending injury in an athlete.

Conservative treatment includes crutches, knee immobilizer, eventual bracing and extended rehab.

To Summarize

Have the injury properly evaluated. Don't delay because you are afraid you'll need surgery, because only a small number of these collateral ligament injuries need surgery.

If however the injury is complicated by an ACL injury, that takes it to a different place.

Again prompt, proper evaluation is the only way to tell what kind of a knee injury it is.

Help is available, but you need to ask.

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It contains a world of musculoskeletal information you and your family and friends can use!

Website, Your Orthopaedic Connection, Archive of all previous Argus articles.

Please check it out. Be well.

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