

MEDIAL COLLATERAL LIGAMENT INJURIES

What is the medial collateral ligament?

The medial collateral ligament (MCL) of the knee is a thick cable located at the inner side of your knee that connects the thigh bone to the shin bone and provides stability to the inner side of the knee.

Injuries to the MCL usually are the result of a direct blow or force to the outer part of your knee, causing the MCL on the inner side to stretch or tear. This is accompanied by pain and possibly a sense of instability along the inner part of your knee.

An injured MCL rarely requires surgery for a full recovery. Differences in the severity of the injury will dictate the treatment plan. Injuries to the MCL can range from a mild sprain to a complete tear of the ligament. The vast majority of all MCL injuries will heal without surgery, even complete tears. Occasionally, however, a torn MCL may not heal, and surgical repair or reconstruction will become necessary.

What is the immediate care for an MCL injury?

Remember the acronym RICE. Rest, ice, compression and elevation. Rest the knee, in other words avoid movements that would stress the inner side of your knee. Ice for 20 minutes at a time, 3-5 times per day. This will help control swelling and pain. Compression in the form of an elastic bandage will help control swelling and provide a little support. Elevation of the knee above heart level will utilize gravity to help drain swelling out of the knee. In cases of more severe MCL injuries, a knee immobilizer or a hinged brace may be necessary to help provide stability

What is the treatment for an MCL injury?

The treatment consists of physical therapy, to restore range of motion, strength and function while the ligament heals. A hinged knee brace may be worn as an adjunct to physical therapy. These are usually worn by patients who have a higher grade injury. MCL tears are graded 1, 2 and 3.

Grade 1 tears: These are considered mild sprains of the MCL. These usually resolve within several weeks. Treatment consists of icing, physical therapy and anti-inflammatory medications. Most patients will be able to get back to their pre-injury level of activity without difficulty. Stress testing results in less than 5 mm of "opening" or looseness when evaluated by your doctor.

Grade 2 tears: These are considered moderate or partial tears of the MCL. For this grade of tear a hinged brace is recommended to provide side-to-side stability. You may or may not need crutches, based on your comfort level. The remainder of the treatment plan is identical to that of a grade 1 injury. The time necessary for a patient to get back to

