

Ligament Injury

Summary

Ligaments are supportive structures between bones. They support, stabilise and limit movement of joints. Treatment depends on whether the joint is open or closed, stable or unstable.

Treatment

They are commonly injured when a joint is forced into an abnormal position. A sprain is a partial injury to ligaments of a joint. A complete tear is when one end of the ligament is pulled off the bone. **Avulsion fractures commonly occur** as the joint between ligament and bone is stronger than the bone. **X-rays should be done** to identify these bony injuries as occasionally they need close monitoring, immobilisation or surgery.

- **Stable joints**, despite their ligament injury, **can be mobilised**. A cast or splint may be necessary for symptom control and to protect it from further injury while it heals.
- **Unstable joints need** a period of **immobilisation in a cast or splint** while the ligament heals. Occasionally they need surgery. Ligaments take 12 weeks to completely heal but joints are generally only immobilised for 4-6 weeks to prevent stiffness.
- **Ulnar collateral ligament injuries of the thumb will not heal if interposition of soft tissue (adductor aponeurosis) between the ligament and bone (Stener Lesion) occurs. These need open repair.**
- Long-term instability of a joint requires ligament reconstruction if symptomatic or limiting function.

