

Gamekeeper's Thumb (UCL Injury)

Diagnosis Explanation:

Gamekeeper's thumb, also called **Skier's thumb**, is an **injury to the ulnar collateral ligament (UCL)** of the **thumb's metacarpophalangeal (MCP) joint**. This ligament stabilizes the **thumb during gripping and pinching movements**. Injury typically occurs from a **fall onto an outstretched hand (FOOSH)**, **forced thumb abduction**, or **repetitive stress**.

Types of UCL Injuries:

- **Grade 1 (Mild Sprain):** Ligament is stretched but intact; mild pain and swelling.
- **Grade 2 (Partial Tear):** Partial ligament tear with some joint instability.
- **Grade 3 (Complete Tear):** Ligament is fully torn; thumb may be unstable and require surgery.

Symptoms:

- **Pain and swelling** at the base of the thumb.
- **Weak grip and difficulty pinching (holding objects, buttons, zippers, writing, etc.).**
- **Bruising and tenderness** along the inside of the thumb.
- **Thumb instability** (feels loose when gripping).

Specific Work Modifications:

- **If your job involves typing or writing:** Use **ergonomic pens, voice dictation software, and hand splints** as needed.
- **If your job requires manual labor:** Avoid **gripping tools or lifting heavy objects with the affected hand**.
- **If your job is desk-based:** Keep the **thumb supported with a brace**, take **breaks every 30 minutes**, and avoid **excessive mouse/keyboard use**.
- **Avoid:** Forceful pinching, repetitive gripping, and prolonged use of the thumb.

Specific Activity Modifications:

- **If you play sports:** Avoid **racket sports, skiing, baseball, and basketball** until cleared for return.
- **If you do weightlifting:** Avoid **gripping-heavy exercises (deadlifts, pull-ups, kettlebells, dumbbells)**.
- **If you do crafting, gardening, or cooking:** Use **adaptive tools with larger handles** to reduce thumb strain.
- **Avoid:** Activities requiring forceful thumb use, twisting motions, and excessive pressure on the injured ligament.

Recommended Supplements:

- **Collagen Peptides** - 10g daily for ligament and joint repair.
- **Vitamin C** - 500mg daily to support collagen synthesis.
- **Glucosamine & Chondroitin** - 1500mg/1200mg daily for joint lubrication and ligament health.
- **Omega-3 Fatty Acids** - 1000mg daily to reduce inflammation.
- **Turmeric (Curcumin)** - 500-1000mg daily for pain relief.

Recommended Nutrition and Hydration:

- **Increase Lean Protein** (chicken, fish, tofu, eggs) to support ligament healing.
- **Eat Anti-Inflammatory Foods** (berries, leafy greens, turmeric, nuts) to reduce swelling.
- **Consume Hydrating Foods** (cucumber, watermelon, citrus) to maintain joint lubrication.
- **Limit Processed Foods & Sugars** to prevent inflammation.
- **Hydration:** Drink **8-10 cups of water daily** to support joint function.

Home Exercise Prescription (Rehabilitation for Gamekeeper's Thumb)

Early Phase (0-2 Weeks, Protecting the Joint & Reducing Pain):

- **Thumb Spica Splinting** - Wear a **thumb splint (spica splint) full-time for 4-6 weeks** to allow healing.
- **RICE Protocol** - Rest, Ice (15-20 min, 3x/day), Compression, Elevation.
- **Passive Thumb Stretching** - Use the opposite hand to gently move the thumb in **small pain-free motions, 10 reps, 2x/day**.

Strengthening Phase (2-6 Weeks, Improving Stability & Function):

- **Isometric Thumb Press** - Press thumb against index finger without moving, **hold 5 seconds, repeat 10 reps, 2x/day**.
- **Rubber Band Thumb Extensions** - Wrap a rubber band around fingers, open the thumb against resistance, **10 reps, 2x/day**.
- **Towel Grip Exercise** - Squeeze a rolled towel using thumb and fingers, **10 reps, 2x/day**.

Advanced Phase (6+ Weeks, Preventing Recurrence & Restoring Function):

- **Thumb Opposition Drill** - Touch thumb to each fingertip, **10 reps, 2x/day**.
- **Grip Strengthening (Soft Ball Squeeze)** - Squeeze a soft ball **5 seconds, repeat 10 reps, 2x/day**.
- **Wrist Strengthening (Light Resistance Band)** - Strengthen wrist and forearm muscles to prevent re-injury, **10 reps, 2x/day**.

Helpful Books:

1. *The Hand and Wrist Pain Solution: Simple Exercises for Relief* - Dr. Ross Clifford.
2. *Arthritis and Hand Therapy: A Self-Help Guide to Managing Joint Pain* - Susan J. Barnhart, PT.

Click [here](#) for more orthopedic patient information.

Contact a Key West orthopedic clinic or reach out to Dr. Jason Pirozzolo.