

Thumb Ligament Injury

Hand Therapy Patient Information

What is a thumb ligament and how is it injured?

You have injured a ligament that supports the middle joint of your thumb. This injury can happen when you fall onto an outstretched hand or from a direct blow, such as when playing sport. Less commonly, the cause is a chronic stretching of the ligament from repetitive load or movement.



What are the symptoms?

- Pain
- Redness, bruising or swelling at the joint
- Stiffness
- Weakness when pinching or gripping with the thumb.
- Limited function of daily tasks

Diagnosis

- It's important to determine the level of damage to your ligament i.e. is the ligament partially or completely torn and whether surgery is required to repair it.
- Assessment is done manually by testing the stability of the ligament
- This can be difficult if the thumb is sore and swollen. If so, other investigations can help to diagnose the injury, such as an x-ray, ultrasound imaging and an injection with local anaesthetic, which allows pain free testing of the ligament.

How is it treated?

If your ligament is partially torn then the recommended treatment will be to wear a splint to protect it for six weeks. This is followed with gentle exercise prescribed by a therapist. Rehabilitation can take around three months before returning to most activities.

If your ligament is completely torn then an operation may be required to repair it. This will also require around six weeks of wearing a thumb splint full time, followed by rehabilitation. In total this will take around three months from the operation date before returning to most activities. Your therapist will guide you through your rehabilitation.

Rehabilitation (up to 8 weeks)

- Start gentle range of movement exercises (below) as instructed by your therapist.
- Discomfort with exercises is okay, but try to avoid pain.
- Try to avoid tight gripping, pinching or lifting anything with your injured hand.
- Return to light activities whilst wearing your splint (washing up, using cutlery, etc.).
- You should be wearing your splint by now.
- If you had surgery, you should massage the scar for 1-2 minutes, every two hours. Your therapist will show you how.
- Use the rehab tips section at the end of this leaflet.

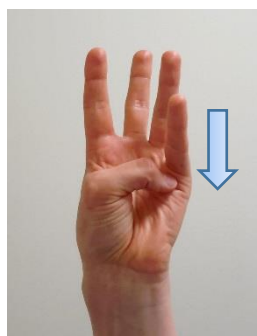
Range of Movement Exercises

Aim to do these every one to two hours. Remove your splint to complete your exercises.

1. Touch the tip of your thumb to the tip of each finger as you are able. Be careful to keep the joints of the thumb in a straight line and not force the thumb into pain or over stretch the ligament injury site. Repeat this 10 times.

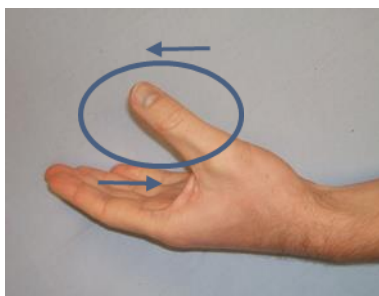


2. Once you can comfortably reach your little fingertip, start to stroke your thumb down your little finger. Repeat 10 times.



THUMB LIGAMENT INJURY

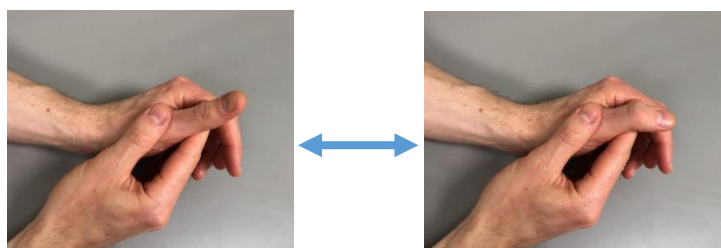
3. With your hand palm up, move your thumb in small pain-free circles clockwise and anticlockwise. Be careful to not over force the movement. Repeat 10 times



4. Rest your hand on a table. Slowly move your thumb out to the side, away from your index finger. You may find this easier by lifting your hand away from the table, to reduce friction.



5. Fix the thumb with your unaffected hand, leaving the end joint free to move. Slowly bend and straighten the end joint.





Rehabilitation (weeks 8-12)

With guidance from your therapist you can...

- Slowly wean yourself off the splint. You may still need the splint for extra support with heavier activities of daily living.
- Increase your use of your thumb/hand for daily activities.
- Return to driving, if you have achieved a comfortable grip.
- Start the strengthening exercises below.
- These exercises should be done two or three times **a week**, with rest days in between.
- Exercise into discomfort but do not push into pain.

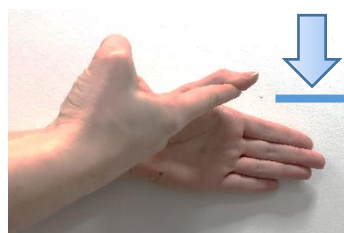
Stage 1 Strengthening exercises (Static)

1. Place a finger from your other hand on one side of your thumb (as shown in the images below). Gently push against it, trying to keep your thumb as rigid as possible. Hold for five to ten seconds.

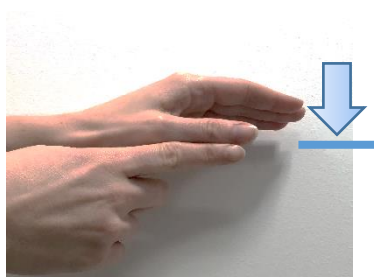
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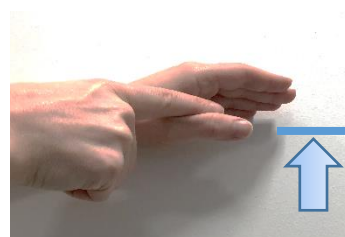
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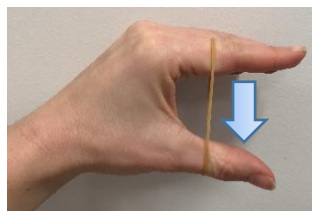
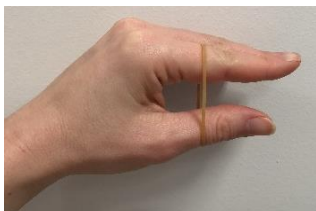
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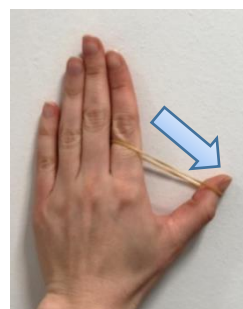
Stage 2 Strengthening exercises (Dynamic)

You can move on to stage 2 once you can do the exercises in stage 1 easily.

1. Place a thin elastic band around your thumb and index finger. Move your thumb away from your index finger. Hold for up to two seconds, then relax and bring your thumb back to your index finger. Do this 10-15 times.



2. Place an elastic band around your thumb and index finger. Keep your hand flat on the table. Move your thumb away from your index finger, stretching the elastic band. Hold for up to two seconds, then relax and bring your thumb back to your index finger. Do this 10-15 times.



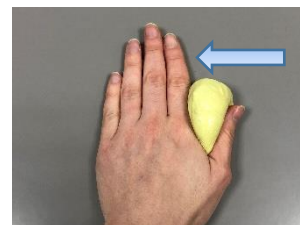
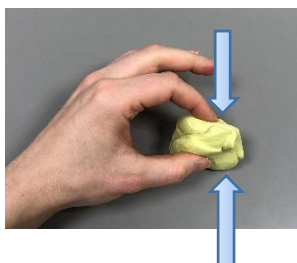
3. Place the elastic band around the thumb and pull it out to the side. Then, slowly pull your thumb in towards your hand, stretching the band. Hold for 1-2 seconds then slowly relax to the starting position. Do this 10-15 times.



Therapy Putty Exercises

Once you have regained movement and basic strength, you can increase the resistance of your exercises by using Therapy Putty. You may wish to discuss this with your therapist.

Some examples are below.



Rehab tips for your hand and wrist

- **Warm water exercises** - Once all wounds have healed, submerge the affected hand/arm in warm water for 5 minutes and practice the exercises you have been taught.
- **Massage** - Rub into the affected area for 2-3 mins, every 2 hours. If your wounds are healed, you can use moisturising cream. Massage will help decrease swelling, improve movement, soften scars and de-sensitise the area affected. Your therapist can guide you.
- If you have any open wounds, monitor for signs of infection (redness, hot, swollen, burning pain, discharge from wound or feeling feverish). If you have any of these signs then visit your GP or A&E.

If you have any problems, please contact your therapist. Contact details are below.

Hand Therapy

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Royal United Hospitals Bath NHS Foundation Trust
Combe Park, Bath, BA1 3NG
01225 821241 | www.ruh.nhs.uk

Please contact the Patient Support and Complaints Team (PSCT) if you require this leaflet in a different format, or would like to feedback your experience of the hospital.

Email ruh-tr.psct@nhs.net or telephone 01225 825656.