Orthopaedic Connection

Ulnar Collateral Ligament Injury (Tear)

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Transforming patient information into patient understanding.

The ulnar collateral ligament is the primary structure resisting stress on the inside part of the elbow. Trauma to the ligament including strains and tears is uncommon in most of us. But in the overhead throwing athlete (baseball) it occurs more often because of the repeated stress on the medial or inner aspect of the elbow.

Symptoms
Onset may be acute with the person experiencing a “pop” while throwing followed by sharp elbow pain. Or it may have a gradual onset with progressive medial elbow pain. The injury seems to happen more often in younger ages especially high school athletes. It can happen to patients at any age, however.

Tests
A careful physical examination of the elbow can usually help make the diagnosis. Plain x-rays should always be done to rule out a fracture, bone spurs or loose pieces in the joint. If suspicion is high for ligament injury an MRI study with contrast is needed.

What Else Could It Be?
Well, lots of things that we need to consider. Ulnar nerve injury, fracture of the “funny bone” in adolescents and inflammation to the inner aspect of the elbow which is a cousin of tennis elbow on the opposite side.

Treatment If Ligament Is Not Torn
Rest the arm and elbow
Rehabilitation by a trained physical therapist or athletic trainer
Corticosteroid injections – NOT
Very slow supervised return to throwing
If pain relief is the main goal, non surgical care is likely to be successful along with activity modification.

Surgical Reconstruction
If return to a high competitive level of a throwing sport is the goal, surgery may be necessary.

Enter Tommy John Surgery
I wish I could tell you the surgical procedure was named after me because my first name is Tom and my middle name is John – but I have to be truthful. It’s actually not named after me!
Many years ago Dr. Frank Jobe an Orthopaedic Surgeon in Los Angeles designed a new procedure to reconstruct the ulnar collateral ligament of a major league pitcher whose name is Tommy John. Dr. Jobe’s new landmark procedure was very successful. From then on the term “Tommy John” surgery stuck and is known far and wide by that name and always will be.
So now you learned what the ulnar collateral ligament is and how Dr. Jobe’s landmark surgery got its name. See, it was worth coming to class this week. Amaze your friends!
My patients put their trust in me and what I do improves the quality of their lives.

**Office Website and Gratiot County Herald Archive**

Wow! Your window to the Orthopaedic and musculoskeletal world opens at [www.orthopodsurgeon.com](http://www.orthopodsurgeon.com). It contains the Website Library of information, Your Orthopaedic Connection and GCH archive of all previous articles.

You will be amazed at all the helpful information it contains.

All of the information pertains to everything I treat in the office and hospital.

Be well.

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