

Lateral Collateral Ligament (LCL) Sprains

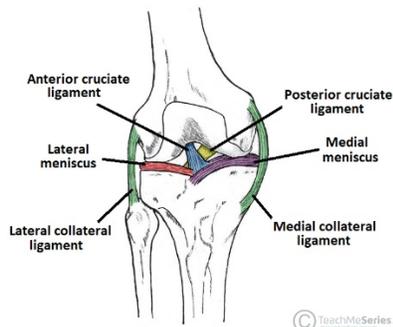
Common Questions



**More information can be found on
Dr. Stetson's website at www.sportsmedicinedr.com**

What is the lateral collateral ligament?

Your knee ligaments connect your thighbone to your lower leg bones. The lateral collateral ligament or LCL is found on the outside part of your knee and medial collateral ligament or MCL is found on the inside of your knee.



What does the lateral collateral ligament do?

The LCL or lateral collateral ligament controls the sideways motion of your knee and braces it against unusual movement.

How common are lateral collateral ligament or LCL tears or sprains?

Because the knee joint relies just on these ligaments and surrounding muscles for stability, it is easily injured and it is one of the most common ligament injury of the knee.

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What are the causes of LCL tears or sprains?

Any direct contact to the knee or hard muscle contraction such as changing direction rapidly while running can injure a knee ligament. Injuries to the collateral ligaments are usually caused by a force that pushes the knee sideways. These are often contact injuries, but not always. Lateral collateral ligament tears often occur as a result of a direct blow to the inside of the knee. This pushes the knee outwards away from the other knee.

Are there different types of LCL tears?

Injured ligaments are considered "sprains" and are graded on a severity scale from one to three. With a grade 1 sprain, the ligament is mildly damaged and it has been slightly stretched, but is still able to help keep the knee joint stable. A grade 2 sprain stretches the ligament to the point where it becomes loose. This is often referred to as a partial tear of the ligament. Finally, a grade 3 sprain is most commonly referred to as a complete tear of the ligament. The ligament has been split into two pieces, and the knee joint is unstable.

What are the symptoms of an LCL tear?

If there is an LCL injury, the pain is on the outside of the knee and there may be a feeling that your knee is giving way.

Do I have to have surgery on my knee for an LCL sprain or tear?

Injuries to the LCL rarely require surgery. Nonsurgical treatment is effective for most injuries to the MCL.

Will the LCL tear or sprain heal on its own?

Yes. Most isolated LCL sprains will heal on their own.

What will the doctor do during my first examination for an LCL injury?

During your first visit, your doctor will talk to you about your symptoms and medical history. He will also ask you questions about your activity level and what activities you enjoy doing and what activities are important to you. During the physical examination, your doctor will check all the structures of your injured knee, and compare them to your non-injured knee.

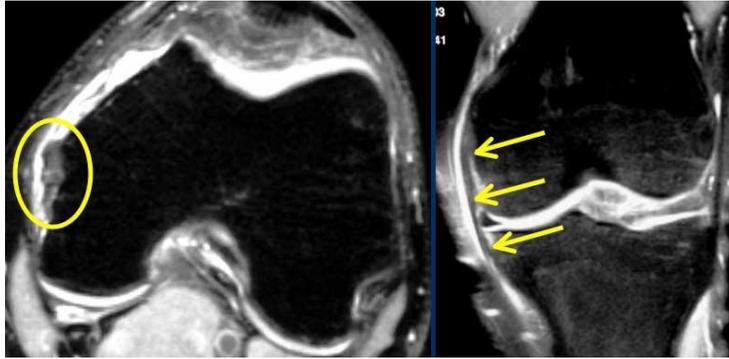
Do I need an x-ray of my knee for an LCL injury?

Although an x-ray will not show any injury to your LCL, x-rays can show whether the injury is associated with a broken bone. It can also show your alignment of your bones which can be important if surgery is done in the future and also if you have any arthritis in your knee. Also, if you are younger and still growing, your growth plates may be open and this can also be seen by x-ray.

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Do I need an MRI for an LCL injury?

A magnetic resonance imaging or MRI scan creates better images of soft tissues like the meniscus and the ligaments of the knee. It is very helpful in helping to diagnose an LCL tear.



What is an LCL sprain or tear treated?

Icing your injury is important in the healing process. The proper way to ice an injury is to use crushed ice directly to the injured area for 15 to 20 minutes at a time, with at least 1 hour between icing sessions. Your knee must be protected from the same sideways force that caused the injury and this is done with a brace. You may need to change your daily activities to avoid risky movements such as twisting or pivoting. To further protect your knee, you may be given crutches to keep you from putting weight on your leg in the early phase of treatment.

How long will it take for an LCL sprain or tear to heal?

For grade one sprains, these will typically heal within one week. For grade two sprains, they may take two to four weeks to heal. A grade three sprain can take anywhere from four to eight weeks to heal.

Will I need physical therapy for an LCL sprain?

Your doctor may suggest physical therapy in order to regain motion and strength in your knee. Specific exercises will restore function to your knee and strengthen the leg muscles that support it.

Do LCL tears ever require surgery?

Most isolated lateral collateral ligament injuries can be successfully treated without surgery. If the lateral collateral ligament is torn in such a way that it cannot heal or is associated with other ligament injuries, your doctor may suggest surgery to repair it.

When can I return to sports after an LCL sprain?

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Depending on the grade or type of tear you have, most patients return to normal activities of daily living within one to two weeks after their injury. For sports, it may take four to six weeks before you are able to return to certain sports that require running and cutting.

Are there specialists who deal with tears of the LCL?

Yes, there are knee specialists who deal with LCL tears. They are orthopaedic surgeons who have done additional training or what is called a fellowship in sports medicine or arthroscopy.

Is Dr. Stetson a knee specialist?

Yes, Dr. Stetson is a knee specialist and he is fellowship trained in sports medicine which includes these types of injuries.

What if I have any other questions?

If you have any other questions, more information can be found on Dr. Stetson's website at www.sportsmedicinedr.com or just call Dr. Stetson's office, we are always happy to answer any questions you may have.

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