



Buckinghamshire Hand Surgeon

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Wrist ligament/ soft tissue injury information sheet

What are they?

The numerous bones that make up the hand and wrist are stabilized by a large number of ligaments. These ligaments allow the wrist to move and function.

The wrist is also stabilized by a joint known as the DRUJ (distal radio-ulnar joint). This is made up of ligaments, tendons and a cartilage disc (TFCC, The triangular fibro cartilage complex), similar to the one found in the knee.

What causes it?

Most injuries to the ligaments and cartilage disc of the wrist are caused by falls onto an outstretched hand following a fall but can sometimes be due to repetitive or strenuous overuse. Disruption or injury to the ligaments of the wrists can lead to wrist instability and can affect the very delicate balance in the way that the bones of the wrist interact with each other. This can lead to the onset of arthritis in the wrist.

What are the symptoms?

Most patients will present with a history of a fall followed by pain, stiffness and swelling in the wrist that isn't settling. Patients may also complain of feeling of an unstable or weak wrist, clicking or clunking in the joint or the inability to perform certain tasks.

Do I need any further investigations?

YES. All patients will require x-rays to assess if there is any damage to the bones of the wrist. Most patients require further investigations including an MRI scan. Some patients need a diagnostic wrist to allow Andy to plan further treatment.

What is the treatment?

Minor sprains and strains of the wrist usually recover with simple analgesia, hand therapy, splinting and activity modification.

Cases that do not settle following non-operative treatment require further investigation and treatment.

1. **Wrist Arthroscopy** and treatment of TFCC tears either repair or debridement.
2. **Open repair** of TFCC tears.
3. **Open ligament reconstruction**- various operations can be performed using "spare" tendons in the wrist to reconstruct damaged ligaments and reduce the likelihood of wrist arthritis.

How long will it take to recover?

Ligament and TFCC injuries are complex and tricky to treat. Your recovery will depend on the extent and longevity of your injury, as well as the type of surgery carried out. In general treatments for the more complex injuries take from 6-8 weeks and include periods on plaster and splint immobilization.

What are the potential complications?

- **Infection** - Uncommon and usually treated very successfully with antibiotics.
- **Delayed healing**- Smokers and those with diabetes are more prone to this.
- **Painful/ Tender Scars**- the vast majority of patients complain of some discomfort around the scar and thumb, this is known as pillar pain and generally resolves with time. Rigorous wound care and desensitization as directed by your hand therapist help prevent this.
- **Recurrence**- depending on the location of the ganglion, literature quotes a recurrence rate of around 15-20%. Mr. Hacker will discuss this with you at the time of your consultation.
- **Damage to surrounding structures**- inadvertent damage or stretching to surrounding nerves may cause some numbness around the scars, although this should improve with time.
- **Stiffness**- Operations to the hand cause stiffness; this can be minimized by working closely with your hand therapist.
- **CRPS**- An uncommon but potentially serious complication of hand surgery leading to pain, stiffness, swelling and discomfort. It is impossible to predict this problem but working closely with your hand therapist and getting your hand moving early has been proven to significantly reduce the risk of this.

When can I get back to normal activities?

The wrist **MUST** be kept clean and dry for **10 days** until the sutures are removed. Most people should be able to return to "desk job" type activities within **3-4 weeks** of the operation. Any **manual work, heavy lifting or sporting activities** should be avoided for at least **6-8 weeks**. You may return to **driving** in around **6 weeks**.

Please inform your insurance company that you have recent hand surgery to ensure that are happy for you to do so.

