

Medial Collateral Ligament (MCL) Injury - Topic Overview

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What is an MCL injury?

An MCL injury is a sprain or tear to the medial collateral ligament. The [MCL](#) is a band of tissue on the inside of your [knee](#). It connects your thighbone to the bone of your lower leg. The MCL keeps the [knee](#) from bending inward.

You can hurt your MCL during activities that involve bending, twisting, or a quick change of direction. For example, the MCL can be injured in football or soccer when the outside of the knee is hit. This type of injury can also occur during skiing and in other sports with lots of stop-and-go movements, jumping, or weaving.

What are the symptoms?

You may have swelling, pain, and tenderness. Several hours after you've injured your knee, your pain may increase, and it might become harder to move your knee. You may notice some bruising.

How is an MCL injury diagnosed?

The doctor will examine you and ask questions about your past health. He or she will also ask how you injured your knee and about your symptoms at the time of injury.

Your doctor will check your range of movement, swelling, and tenderness.

You may have some tests, including an [X-ray](#) and an [MRI](#).

What is the treatment?

Most MCL injuries can be treated at home with rest, ice, and anti-inflammatory medicine. Your doctor may suggest that you use crutches and wear a brace that protects but allows for some movement of your knee.

You may need to reduce your activity for a few weeks. But doing gentle movement as advised by your doctor will help you heal.

A severe tear may need surgery. But this usually isn't done unless you also injure other parts of your knee, such as the [anterior cruciate ligament \(ACL\)](#) or [meniscus](#).

Your treatment will depend on how severe your injury is.

- **Mild or grade 1** injuries usually get better in 1 to 3 weeks and may only need home treatment along with using crutches for a short time.
- **Moderate or grade 2** injuries usually get better in about a month. You may need to wear a hinged knee brace and limit how much [weight](#) you put on your leg.
- **Severe or grade 3** injuries may require wearing a hinged brace for a few months, and limiting weight on the leg for 4 to 6 weeks.

What is the treatment? continued...

Your doctor may recommend [physical therapy](#) to increase range of motion and strengthen your quadriceps muscles and hamstrings.

Home treatment

- Put ice or a cold pack on your knee for 10 to 20 minutes at a time. Try to do this every 1 to 2 hours (when you're awake) for the first 3 days after your injury or until the swelling goes down. Put a thin cloth between the ice and your [skin](#).
- If your doctor recommended crutches or a brace, use them as directed.
- Prop up your knee on a pillow when you ice it or anytime you sit or lie down. Do this for about 3 days following your injury. Try to keep your knee above the level of your [heart](#). This will help reduce swelling.
- Take anti-inflammatory medicines to reduce pain and swelling. These include [ibuprofen](#) ([Advil](#), [Motrin](#)) and [naproxen](#) ([Aleve](#)). Read and follow all instructions on the label.
- Wear a brace, if your doctor recommends it, to support your knee while it heals. Wear it as directed.
- Do stretches or strength exercises as your doctor suggests.

When should you call your doctor?

Call your doctor now or seek immediate medical care if:

- You have severe or increasing pain.
- Your swelling is getting worse.

Watch closely for any changes in your health, and be sure to contact your doctor if you do not get better as expected.