

Medial Collateral Ligament Injuries

The Medial Collateral Ligament (MCL) is one of the 4 main ligaments that hold the knee together. It is found on the inside of your knee. It is attached to the end of the thigh bone on the bump on the inside of the knee just above the knee joint. It passes down the inside of the knee, as a broad flat band. It attaches to the shin bone on the inside of the knee from the joint itself for 5 to 7 cm down the shin bone.

Injuries occur when the knee is bent inwards towards the other knee and the foot outwards, stretching or straining the ligament. These are often contact injuries in sport.

The main complaint is of pain over the ligament. This is made worse by exercise. Sometimes the knee swells and bruises on the inside. The knee may feel unstable.

X-rays do not show damage to ligaments but are often useful to ensure that the knee is not broken / fractured. The MCL can best be seen on a MRI scan.



Damage to the MCL is divided into 3 types

- Grade I
 - The ligament is stretched with small tears within it.
 - It is able to keep the knee stable.
- Grade II
 - The ligament is stretched to the point at which it becomes loose.
 - This is sometimes called a partial tear
- Grade III
 - This is where the ligament is completely torn.
 - The knee is unstable.
 - Often other ligaments are also damaged

Mr Andrew Lavender
Consultant Knee Surgeon



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Treatment

The MCL is a ligament that can heal itself in the right circumstances.

Most MCL injuries are Grade I. These can be treated with R.I.C.E. (Rest, Ice, Compression, Elevation).

Braces are used for Grade II injuries. These prevent the knee from being moved sideways, while at the same time allowing it to move backwards and forwards.

Physiotherapy can be of use in all grades of injury to help relieve the pain and keep the knee moving.

Surgery is only required in Grade III injuries. These usually occur with injuries to other ligaments around the knee. The combination of injuries requires discussing with a specialist knee surgeon like Mr Lavender so that the best treatment option can be planned.