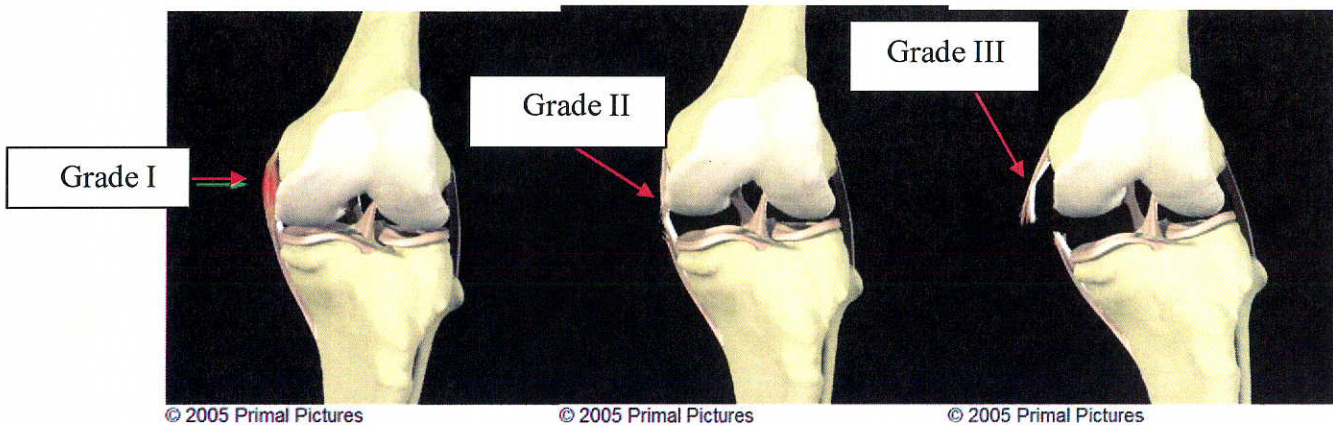


Medial Collateral Ligament (MCL) Sprain

Definition: The medial collateral ligament (MCL) of the knee is a broad ligament on the inside part of the knee that prevents the knee from feeling like it is going to buckle inward. A ligament is a thick band of tissue that connects one bone to another to help stabilize a joint.

Common Terms: MCL tear, MCL ligament sprain, knee sprain.



Typical Mechanism of Injury: The MCL is most commonly sprained from a direct blow to the outside of the knee. The MCL may also be injured with an excessive outward twist when the foot is planted on the ground. This is seen more commonly on surfaces that have increased friction, like artificial turf and courts.

Common Signs and Symptoms: Pain is usually the most common complaint. Swelling and stiffness are also common. Occasionally a pop may be heard when the injury occurs. MCL sprains are graded according to their level of severity: Grade I (minor), Grade II (moderate), Grade III (severe). A Grade I sprain will have a few fibers torn, some pain, little to no swelling, and good stability. A Grade II sprain will have pain, a partial tearing of the ligament, more instability, swelling, and joint stiffness. A Grade III sprain will have a complete rupture of the ligament, gross instability, swelling, and severe pain followed by a dull ache. The knee will be most painful to try and fully bend and fully extend. A position somewhere in between, with the knee slightly bent, will feel most comfortable.

Common Treatment: Early treatment involves ice; compression wraps to help minimize any swelling, and elevation to keep the swelling down as well. It is also beneficial to stay off of the knee as much as possible. Rehabilitation modalities such as electrical stimulation and ultrasound may help with the healing, and supervised progression will assure a safer and quicker return to activity. If the MCL is completely torn surgery is occasionally recommended – but not commonly.

Prevention: A hinged brace may aid in the prevention of this injury, allowing for protection of the area and letting others around you know that they should be careful around your knee. The brace will also be helpful when you return to activities.

Expectations: Fortunately most MCL injuries do not require surgical repair. Recovery may still take up to several weeks and sometimes even a few months. Occasionally surgery is recommended – your surgeon can talk to you about these options. Most of the time recovery after an MCL injury will allow the athlete to return to all activities without any long lasting effects.

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