

What You Should Know About Skier's Thumb

Skiing now becomes a mainstream winter activity for a family. While choosing the best ski resort and skiing gear, it is important to take note of the common skiing injuries and how to prevent them.

Skiing accidents are the most common causes of damage to the ligament that cause skier's thumb. It is not exclusive to skiers and can occur to anyone when your thumb is being forced into an extreme position.

What causes Skier's Thumb?

Skier's thumb is a very common skiing injury, it refers to an acute injury to a ligament of the thumb. The condition is common among skiers who fall with the ski pole still in hand, and the handle of the pole causes the thumb to be stretched out, and tearing or stretching the ligament of the thumb.

To minimise the chance of injury, drop your ski pole during all falls. It is recommended to use poles with finger-groove grips instead of wrist straps to make discarding your poles easier.

What are the symptoms?

These signs and symptoms may occur minutes to hours after the fall that created the injury.

- Pain at the base of the thumb in the webspace between

thumb and index finger

- Swelling of the thumb
- Grasping ability decreases between the thumb and the index finger
- Touching the index finger side of the thumb shows a sign of tenderness
- Blue or black discolouration of the skin over the thumb
- Moving the thumb in any or all directions worsens the pain
- Referred pain from the thumb that extended to the wrist

How to treat?

Treatment depends on the severity of the injury. Normally sprains are graded as Grade I, II, or III. Grade I represents minor stretching or tearing in the ligament. Grade II refers to partial tearing in the ligament and mild instability in the joint. Grade III represents a complete tear. Grade I and II injuries can usually be treated by preventing thumb movement with a cast, taping, or splinting for up to 6 weeks. The treatment may be accompanied by anti-inflammatory medications, ice, and elevation.

Surgery may be required for Grade III injury to restore mobility of the thumb and the stability of the joint, followed by 4-8 weeks of post-operation rehabilitation.



If you experience persistent pain lasting for more than 1 – 2 days, please consult your doctor immediately.

Hit the slopes safely and enjoy the winter fun!

About the author

Dr Sally Cheng is an orthopaedic surgeon focusing on hand and elbow. Keen on snowboarding, sailing and scuba diving.