Dislocation, Thumb

The thumb is a hinge joint. When the thumb comes out of the socket it is called a dislocation.

DIAGNOSIS

The *diagnosis* (learning what is wrong) of this injury is often made by examination. The first sign is pain with loss of movement. The pinch grip between thumb and index finger is painful and the thumb may give way when holding an object. Severe forms of the injury will cause looseness *(laxity*) in the joint, indicating a tear of the ligaments. X-rays are taken to make sure there are not other injuries. The most common of these injuries is a thumb sprain. A break *(rupture*) is a relatively common problem amongst sportsmen and sportswomen (sometimes known as game keeper's thumb), and is caused by an abduction injury to the thumb, where the thumb is bent away from the hand, or away from the rest of the fingers, sometimes from a fall onto the hand.

TREATMENT

The treatment of this injury is to put the ball back into the socket. Mild sprains require immobilization in a thumb spica (a spiral bandage) for one to two weeks.

When a thumb ligament is torn, treatment consists of surgical repair of the ligament, followed by immobilization of the metacarpal bone behind the thumb and the thumb itself in plaster for six weeks. The *metacarpal* is the large bone at the base of the thumb, just like the metacarpals of the fingers which are the bones of the hand between the fingers and the wrist. Physical therapy is started as soon as the ligament is healed completely, and should last no more than three months. Physical therapy is done to maintain the range of motion and to regain strength. Sometimes there is residual stiffness and pain for which pain relieving and anti-inflammatory medications can be taken.

Dislocation of the thumb is usually on the back of the thumb *(dorsal*); the head of the first metacarpal bone penetrates and damages the joint capsule. Treatment consists of closed or open reduction (putting the bones back into position, either by manipulation or surgically) followed by immobilization in plaster for four weeks.

HOME CARE INSTRUCTIONS

- Apply ice to the dislocation for 15 to 20 minutes each hour while awake for the first 2 days. Put the ice in a plastic bag and place a towel between the bag of ice and your skin.
- Wear your splint for 1 week or as directed or until seen again. If you remove the splint to dress or bathe, be sure your thumb remains in the same position as when the splint is on.
- Only take over-the-counter or prescription medicines for pain, discomfort, or fever as directed by your caregiver.
- If your caregiver has given you a follow-up appointment, it is very important to keep that appointment. Not keeping the appointment could result in a chronic or permanent injury, pain, and disability. If there is any problem keeping the appointment, you must call back to this facility for assistance.

SEEK MEDICAL CARE IF:

- Pain or swelling to the injury increases and is not relieved with medications.

SEEK IMMEDIATE MEDICAL CARE IF:

- Your finger becomes very swollen or painful, or develops a bluish discoloration, coldness, or numbness.

MAKE SURE YOU:

- Understand these instructions.
- Will watch your condition.

- Will get help right away if you are not doing well or get worse.

Document Released: 04/07/2004 Document Re-Released: 03/16/2010
ExitCare® Patient Information ©2011 ExitCare, LLC.