

LIGAMENTS



Did you know there are about 900 ligaments in the human body?

A ligament is a short band of tough but flexible fibrous connective tissue that connects bones to other bones. They have a number of different roles throughout the body including; stabilising joints throughout range of motion, protecting bones from contact/ absorbing stress and providing proprioceptive feedback which is the body's ability to know the position of our joints. These are all particularly important when participating in any kind of activity as sudden or uncontrolled movements can lead to ligamentous injuries.

The most common ligament injuries occur in the knee & ankle, while it is possible to injure ligaments in the shoulder, neck and back these are less common. Signs and symptoms of a ligament injury include; pain, swelling/bruising and a sense of instability. To help make it easy to understand the severity of a ligament injury they are categorised into three grades.

GRADE 1 Stretching, but no tear in the ligament

GRADE 2 Partial tears of the ligament

GRADE 3 Severe or complete ligament tear

Immediate treatment of a ligament injury like any other soft tissue injury should follow the RICER protocol (Rest, Ice, Compression, Elevation and Referral). This should be followed for the first 72 hours after the injury. The severity of the injury will determine how quickly you can stop resting and start your rehabilitation, your Physiotherapist will assess the injury and provide you with specific exercises to assist in your recovery and will help guide you to know when it is safe to return to sport or activity and help prevent further injury. Most ligamentous injuries will heal within 2-6 weeks depending on the severity of the injury and you can generally return safely to sport within 4-12 weeks.

It is important to note that ligament injuries that are more severe e.g. inability to weight bear, extreme bruising or swelling may require further investigation and possibly specialist involvement to return to pre-injury function e.g. ACL where surgery may be indicated.

