

# Ski and Snowboard Injuries

Skiing and snowboarding are some of the most popular winter sports and can result in different injuries to the upper extremity. Fortunately, there are some ways to decrease the chance for injury.

## Skiing Injuries

One of the most common upper extremity skiing injuries is a thumb ligament tear. A ligament is the soft tissue structure that connects bones to bones. A ligament stabilizes the thumb on each side where it attaches to the hand. The ulnar collateral ligament (UCL) is on the side near the index finger. The radial collateral ligament (RCL) is on the other side (**Figure 1**). The UCL is the most commonly injured.

The injury typically occurs with a fall when the ski pole does not release from the hand and the pole bends the thumb in a stressful position. Three ways to avoid this injury are:

1. Never place your hand down on the snow to try to avoid a fall.
2. Do **not** place your hands through the strap, as demonstrated in **Figure 2**. The strap should be held alongside the pole.
3. Try to let go of the pole when falling.

If your thumb hurts after a fall, it may be from a UCL injury, sometimes called “skier’s thumb.” You should visit a hand surgeon, who will determine whether it is a partial or complete ligament tear.

## Treatment for Skiing Injuries

A partial tear and some complete tears can be treated with a cast or splint. Other complete tears need to be repaired surgically.

## Snowboarding Injuries

Snowboarding results in injuries to the wrist and forearm. The natural protective reaction to an unexpected fall is to stop oneself. The hands are placed out to stop the fall, which can lead to a wrist injury (**Figure 3**). To avoid these injuries, wear wrist guards or gloves that have built-in wrist guards.

If you injure your wrist while snowboarding, visit a hand surgeon. Your doctor will examine your wrist and may use x-rays, an MRI or a CT scan to diagnose the problem.

## Treatment for Snowboarding Injuries

Treatment may consist of a splint, cast or surgery. Occasionally, special devices are needed such as metal pins, plates or screws to stabilize wrist fractures and/or ligament injuries.

