

## Meniscus Tear



Healthy Meniscus - Top View



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If you have had knee pain recently, or periodically for months or years, it's possible that you have a meniscus tear, also referred to as "torn cartilage." A meniscus tear often occurs during a twisting or pivoting motion with the foot planted on the ground – for example, when playing tennis or squatting in the garden – and it can also occur from lifting. A tear can occur at any time during life, but it is rarely seen in young children. With age, the menisci become worn and may tear more easily.

The symptoms of a meniscus tear depend on the size and location of the tear. Because the menisci have no nerve endings, pain associated with a tear is actually due to swelling and injury to the surrounding tissue. With a small tear, you may experience minimal pain. Over several days, slight swelling may develop gradually. Often, you may walk with minimal pain, but squatting, lifting, or rising from a seated position may increase the pain. Small tears may possibly heal on their own with a brace and a period of rest.

With a typical meniscus tear, you will feel pain at the side or centre of the knee, depending on the tear's location. Often, walking is not impeded, and the knee may swell or feel stiff. You may also experience limited bending of the knee. Over time, symptoms may diminish but could recur with activities that involve twisting or overuse of the knee. Pain may appear and disappear over a period of years, and the tear may become larger if left untreated. Other symptoms include tenderness when pressing on the meniscus, popping or clicking within the knee, and limited motion of the knee joint.

The location of the tear may determine whether or not the knee is able to heal on its own. Tears at the outer edge of the meniscus tend to heal more easily because there is a good blood supply. However, the inner two-thirds of the meniscus does not have a good blood supply, which makes it difficult for tears to heal on their own. In time, this may cause the knee to develop arthritis.

Ice packs and immobilization can be used for immediate treatment of almost any knee injury. Such simple measures will help to decrease swelling and pain in the joint. When a tear begins to interfere with everyday activities, arthroscopic surgery may be necessary to prevent additional damage and to restore the knee's full functional abilities.

## Preparation for Arthroscopic Knee Surgery

Preparation for your surgery begins weeks and sometimes months before the surgery date. Here are just a few events and considerations you may experience:

1. **Initial Surgical Consultation.** Preoperative X-rays, a complete medical history, a complete surgical history, and a complete list of all medications (i.e., prescription, over-the-counter, vitamin supplements) and allergies will be reviewed.
2. **Complete Physical Examination.** Your surgeon will perform a physical examination and determine if your internist or family physician should assist with optimization of medical conditions prior to the surgery. This will ensure that you are in the best physical condition possible on surgery day.
3. **Physical Therapy.** In some cases, instruction in an exercise program to begin prior to surgery, as well as an overview of the rehabilitation process after surgery, will better prepare you for postoperative care.
4. **Preparation for Surgery.** You may want to wear loose-fitting clothes or sweat pants, and also bring crutches. You should bring your insurance information and a list of all your medications and dosages as well as drug allergies. You will need to arrange for someone to drive you home.
5. **Evening Before Surgery.** Do not eat or drink after midnight. Your surgeon or anaesthesia provider may recommend that you take some of your routine prescription medications with a sip of water.

This is a brief overview of the activities that typically occur on your surgery day:

1. You will be admitted to the hospital or surgery centre.
2. Your vital signs, such as blood pressure and temperature, will be measured.
3. A clean hospital gown will be provided.
4. An IV will be started to give you fluids and medication during and after the procedure.
5. All jewellery, dentures, contact lenses, and nail polish must be removed.
6. Your knee will be scrubbed and shaved in preparation for surgery.
7. An anaesthesia provider will discuss the type of anaesthesia that will be used.
8. Your surgeon will confirm and initial the correct surgical knee and site.

## Postoperative Care / Rehabilitation

### Postoperative Care

After surgery, you will be transported to the recovery room for close observation of your vital signs and circulation. You may remain in the recovery room for a few hours.

When you leave the hospital, your knee will be covered with a bandage, and you may be instructed to walk with the assistance of crutches. You also may be instructed to ice or elevate your knee.

Your surgeon will likely provide further details regarding postoperative care for your specific procedure.

### Rehabilitation

Steps for rehabilitation following a meniscus repair vary from physician to physician. To learn what activities will be involved in your own rehabilitation, consult your orthopaedic specialist.