

Introduction

Over the last few years, knee injuries have become common because people are exercising more frequently. Diagnosing and treating these injuries may involve a simple surgery to look at the inside of the knee joint.

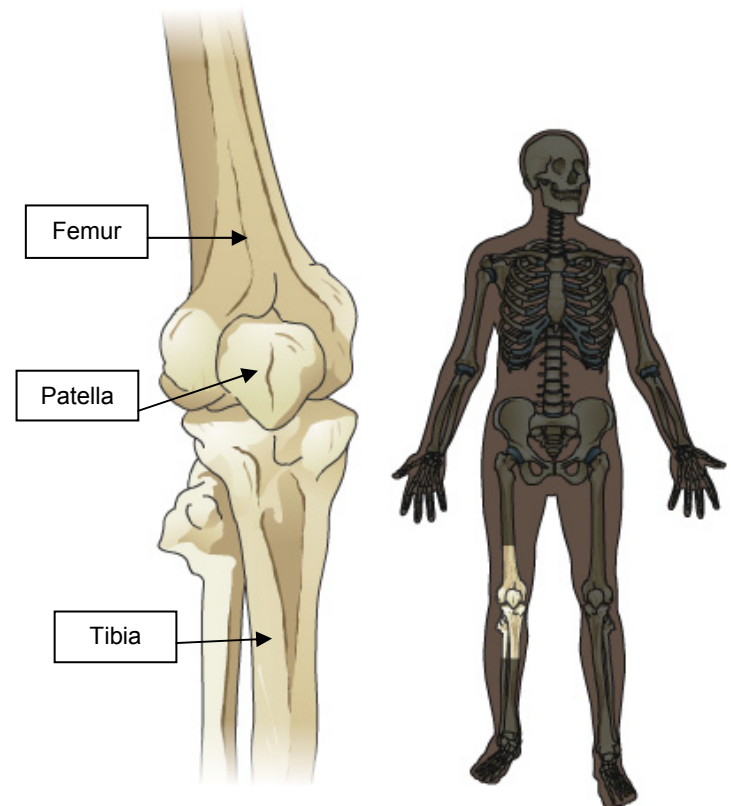
If your doctor recommends knee arthroscopy, the decision whether or not to have the surgery is also yours. This reference summary will help you better understand the benefits and risks of knee surgery.

Anatomy

The knee joint joins the thigh bone to the lower leg bone. The bones included in this joint are the femur, or the thigh bone; the tibia, one of the lower leg bones; and the patella, a floating bone that gives the knee its round shape.

These bones are covered by a special tissue called cartilage, or meniscus. The smooth surfaces of the meniscus allow for smooth, painless movement at the knee joint.

Ligaments connect the bones and help stabilize the knee.



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Symptoms and Their Causes

Arthritis, or inflammation of the joint, causes the smooth surfaces to become rough. Injury to the knee can cause meniscus tears. The ligaments may also rupture. The patella also may become unstable so that it moves out of its normal alignment. Any of these conditions can cause severe pain and inability to walk.

Alternative Treatments

Patients may try anti-inflammatory medications such as aspirin or ibuprofen to decrease the inflammation in the knee.

Physical therapy may help keep the joint as mobile as possible and prevent further injury.

The use of a knee stabilizer may also help. Injections of steroids in the knee joint may help the pain and reduce the inflammation.

For overweight patients, losing weight reduces stress on the knee. Patients may lose weight through a low fat diet and a regular exercise program.

If the pain becomes disabling and does not respond to the medications and physical therapy, knee arthroscopy may be considered.

Surgical Treatment

The operation allows the surgeon to look inside the joint and determine the exact problem. It also allows the surgeon to fix problems that can be repaired in surgery.

For example, the surgeon may be able to shave off a part of the cartilage that is loose and causing lots of pain. The operation is done through a few small incisions in the area of the knee. The scopes needed to look and work inside the knee are inserted through these incisions.



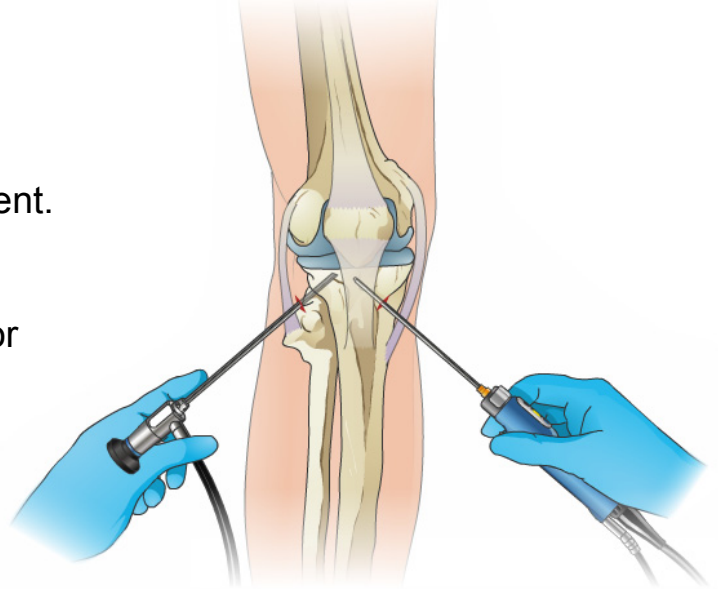
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The scopes allow the doctor to inspect the joint and take care of some of the problems found during the inspection.

The orthopedic surgeon can do any of the following procedures through the scopes:

- Removing or repairing torn meniscal cartilage.
- Reconstructing a torn cruciate ligament.
- Trimming of torn pieces of articular cartilage.
- Removing loose fragments of bone or cartilage.
- Removing inflamed synovial tissue.

At the end of the operation, the small incisions are closed and the patient usually goes home the same day.



Risks and Complications

This operation is very safe. There are, however, several possible risks and complications which are very unlikely, but possible. You need to know about them just in case they happen. By being informed, you may be able to help your doctor detect complications early.

The risks and complications include risks related to anesthesia, risks related to any type of surgery, and risks specific to this surgery.

Risks related to anesthesia include but are not limited to heart attacks, strokes, pneumonia, and blood clots in the legs. These risks will be discussed with you in greater detail by your anesthesiologist.

Blood clots in the legs can occur. This usually shows up a few days after surgery. It causes the leg to swell and hurt a lot. These blood clots can get dislodged from the leg and go to the lungs, where they will cause shortness of breath, chest pain, and possibly death.

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Sometimes the shortness of breath can happen without warning. It is therefore extremely important to let your doctors know if any of these symptoms occur. Getting out of bed shortly after surgery may help decrease the risk of this complication.

Some of the risks are seen in any type of surgery. These include:

- Infection, deep or at the skin level.
- Bleeding, either during or after the operation.
- Skin scars that may be painful or ugly.

Other risks and complications are related specifically to this surgery. These again are very rare. However, it is important to know about them.

Organs around the knee that are close to the surgical area may be injured. However, these injuries are rare. Arteries and veins going to the leg may be injured.

Nerves going down to the leg may also be injured causing leg weakness or decreased sensation.

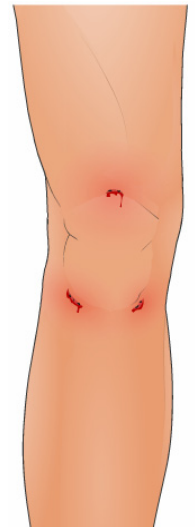
The pain may not be relieved by the operation. It may even become worse than before the surgery. However this rarely happens.

After the Surgery

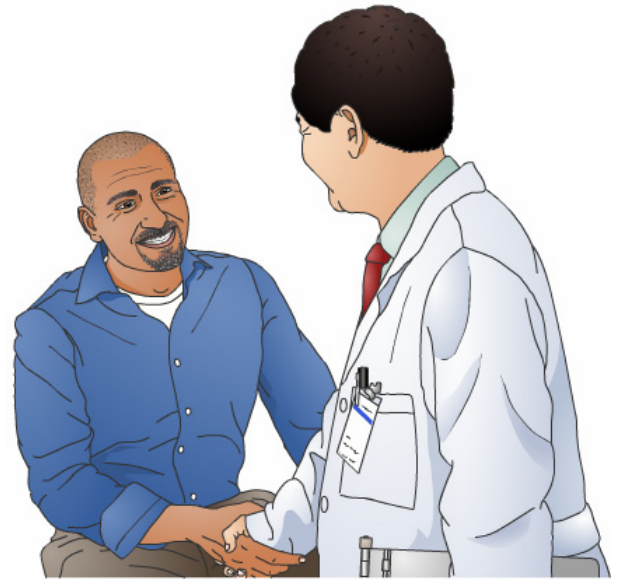
Most patients go home the same day of the operation. You will need to keep your leg elevated when you are not walking. You may also be given a knee immobilizer or a crutch to use for a short period after the operation. Physical therapy may be necessary after the operation to rehabilitate your knee.

Summary

Damage to the knee can happen in the bones, the ligaments, or in the meniscus. If the damage is bad enough, arthroscopy can be a way to find out what kind of damage has been done and to repair some kinds of problems.



Arthroscopic knee surgery is very successful in helping to decrease pain and improving your quality of life. This operation is very safe with good results. However, as you have learned, complications may happen. Knowing about them will help you detect them early if they happen.



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