

Meniscal Tears

Definition: A meniscus is a small piece of tissue that acts like a shock absorber. There are 2 meniscus located in the knee joint between the femur (thigh bone) and tibia (shin bone). The main role of the meniscus is to act as a cushion and protect the bones from grinding together. A tear in the meniscus occurs when a piece of the tissue is sliced or ripped. In some cases the torn piece of meniscus breaks off or folds over on to itself.

Common Terms: Sprained knee, “Catching” knee, “Locking” Knee. Cartilage tear

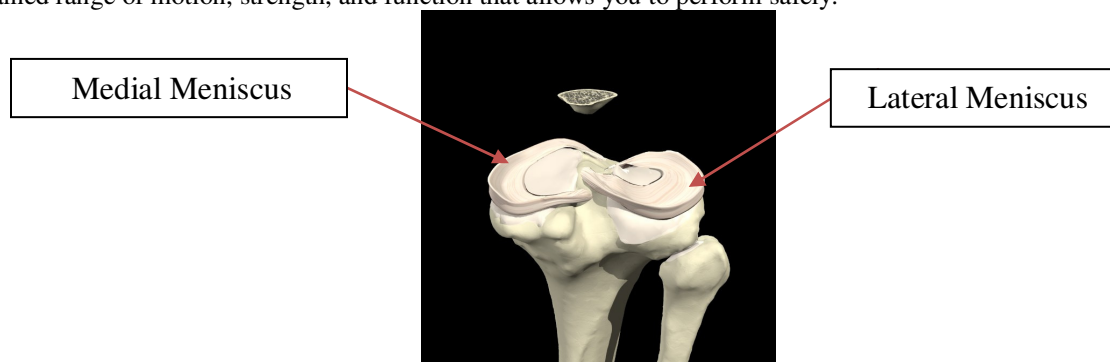
Typical Mechanism of Injury: Most meniscal tears occur as a result of twisting the knee while the foot is planted on the ground. This can happen when making a sudden turn or change of direction or landing from a jump. The more friction associated with the surface, for example a basketball court versus a wet grass field, the more likely meniscal tears are going to occur. Tears can also happen from simple activities like twisting getting out of the car or getting up from the ground. As we get older the meniscus becomes more fragile and it takes much less of an injury to tear them.

Common Signs and Symptoms: A tear of the meniscus in the knee will irritate the joint and cause pain, swelling, and stiffness. It can also cause a “catching” or “locking” sensation in the knee. Oftentimes, swelling may not appear until the day after the actual injury occurs. Some people can still walk or even play sports after their meniscus is torn, but may be limited by any of the previously mentioned symptoms. Sometimes a ‘pop’ or ‘snap’ will be heard when the injury occurs.

Common Treatment: Meniscus tears do not usually heal. Sometimes after the injury the meniscus tear will not cause any pain or other symptoms and then no treatment is necessary. If the knee does not get better or you continue to have symptoms of swelling, pain, catching, locking or buckling – then surgery may be needed to correct the problem. The surgery is called arthroscopy and the surgeon will either remove the torn piece of meniscus from the knee or repair the meniscus tear with sutures, depending on the type of tear. Arthroscopy is a surgery requiring only small incisions, which helps limit pain and promote quicker healing. You can usually go home the same day as your surgery, and the amount of weight bearing is usually determined by the type of surgical procedure that is performed. If surgery is not required then the symptoms should be controlled through the use of ice, compression, knee sleeves or braces, and/or anti-inflammatory medicines.

Prevention: Unfortunately, most injuries to the meniscus occur during accidents and are not preventable. Knowledge about this condition is a precaution one can take in efforts to reduce their risk or at least receive treatment early before further damage occurs.

Expectations: If you have a small tear that has not been repaired or removed, it is possible to function well and continue sports participation. However, your knee may sometimes swell, lock, buckle, feel stiff, or hurt during exercise activities. If you have surgery, you will need to spend time rehabilitating your knee. Most people return to their previous level of activity within weeks to months after surgery. Again, this all depends upon the type of procedure that is performed. You may return to sport after your knee has regained range of motion, strength, and function that allows you to perform safely.



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