



Dislocating or Subluxating Patella

Definition: The patella (knee cap) slides in and out of a groove in the femur (thigh bone) as the knee bends and straightens. If the patella pops out of the groove this is called a dislocated patella. If the patella pops out and then immediately gets back into the groove then it is called a subluxated patella.

Common Terms: Dislocated patella; dislocated knee cap; “popped out” knee cap; “Out of place” knee.

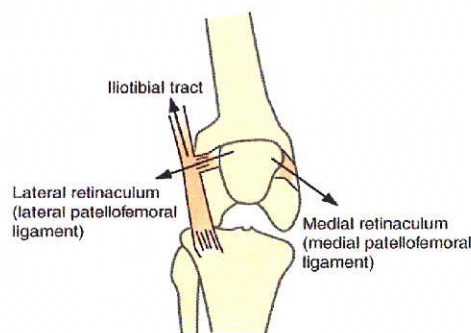
Typical Mechanism of Injury: This injury usually occurs with a sudden change of direction where the foot is planted firmly in the ground and the upper leg twists. Landing awkwardly can also cause this type of an injury. A direct blow to the side of the knee can also dislocate a patella. The patella usually pops out to the outside of the knee

Common Signs and Symptoms: With a subluxing patella, a person will complain of feeling the kneecap “popping out of place and going back in”. The knee will become swollen and painful. Walking may be difficult and it will be difficult to fully bend and straighten the knee. With a dislocation, the patella will remain displaced and there will be pain, swelling, and loss of function and motion. Straightening the knee will usually make the knee cap pop back into place

Common Treatment: Immediate care includes ice, compression (ace wrap), elevation and rest to control swelling and pain. Pain medicine may also be recommended. X-rays are usually taken to rule out a fracture or chipped bone. Occasionally an MRI may also be needed, but not in every case. Rehabilitation may be helpful to control pain and swelling, improve any loss of range of motion, and strengthen surrounding muscles. A brace may also be suggested. In some cases, surgery may be recommended to prevent future occurrences of this injury or if there is a loose bone chip.

Prevention: Many times it is not possible to prevent a patella from subluxating or dislocating. Individuals who have weak thigh muscles, abnormal lower leg alignment, improper footwear, and inadequate training and sport technique are more prone to this injury. However, one can reduce the risk by improving muscular strength of the thigh and hip as well as working on balance.

Expectations: Outcomes following a patella subluxation or dislocation vary from person to person based upon each case scenario, but are usually very favorable. Improved function may take months, and a longer recovery is expected if surgery is necessary.



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