

Education

Knee Arthroscopy

What is knee arthroscopy?

Knee arthroscopy is a surgical procedure in which the doctor examines your knee with an instrument called an arthroscope. An arthroscope is a tube with a light on the end that is inserted in your knee and projects an image of the inside of your knee onto a TV monitor. The arthroscope is about the diameter of a pencil.

When is it used?

This procedure is used to diagnose the cause of pain, swelling, tenderness, or weakness in your knee and repair any damage.

Examples of alternatives are:

- Limit your activity.
- Take anti-inflammatory drugs to reduce swelling.
- Wear a brace.
- Have physical therapy.
- Have open knee surgery.
- Have MRI (magnetic resonance imaging).
- Choose not to have treatment, recognizing the risks of your condition.

You should ask your health care provider about these choices.

How do I prepare for knee arthroscopy?

Plan for your care and recovery after the operation, especially if you are to have general anesthesia. Allow for time to rest and try to find other people to help you with your day-to-day duties.

Follow any instructions your health care provider may give you. Do not eat or drink anything after midnight or the morning before the procedure. Do not even drink coffee, tea, or water after midnight.

What happens during the procedure?

You will have a general, regional, or local anesthetic. A general anesthetic will relax your muscles and make you feel as if you are in a deep sleep. Both local and regional anesthetics numb part of the body while you remain awake. All three types of anesthesia should keep you from feeling pain during the operation.

The doctor will then insert the arthroscope, a tube containing a saltwater solution, and a probe instrument into the lower part of your knee. He or she will inject fluid into the knee.

Your doctor may find loose material in the knee or a tear in the cartilage or ligaments. Sometimes the doctor can repair the tears and remove loose pieces of cartilage using small instruments and the arthroscope. If the problem cannot be fixed by this procedure, the doctor may recommend open knee surgery.

After the procedure the doctor will close the small openings with one or two stitches or sticky tape.

What happens after the procedure?

- You can go home the day of the procedure.
- You should take it easy for at least the next 2 or 3 days.
- Keep your leg elevated, with your foot higher than your knee and your knee higher than your hip.
- Start bending the knee as soon as possible.
- Use your crutches until you can walk nearly normally.
- Do light strengthening exercises if instructed to do so by your health care provider.
- Ask your health care provider when you can resume full activity. Your recovery time will depend on what was done and how much arthritis you have in your knee.

Ask your health care provider what other steps you should take and when you should come back for a checkup.

What are the benefits of knee arthroscopy?

Your knee problem may be corrected without a large incision, which requires a longer stay in the hospital, more discomfort, and greater expense.

What are the risks associated with this procedure?

- There are some risks when you have general anesthesia. Discuss these risks with your health care provider.
- A local or regional anesthetic may not numb the area quite enough and you may feel some minor discomfort. Also, in rare cases, you may have an allergic reaction to the drug used in this type of anesthesia. Local or regional anesthesia is considered safer than general anesthesia in people who are older or have certain medical conditions.
- Nerve injury can occur, causing numbness around the small incisions.
- During repair of the cartilage, nerve or artery damage can occur, which can cause numbness, weakness, or pain in your leg and foot. This rarely happens.
- Infection and bleeding may occur.

You should ask your health care provider how these risks apply to you.

When should I call my health care provider?

Call your health care provider immediately if:

- There is excessive drainage from the puncture sites.
- There is unusual pain in your knee.
- You develop swelling in your calf or thigh that is not relieved by elevating your leg.
- You develop a fever.

Call your health care provider during office hours if:

- You have questions about the procedure or its result.
- You want to make another appointment.

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