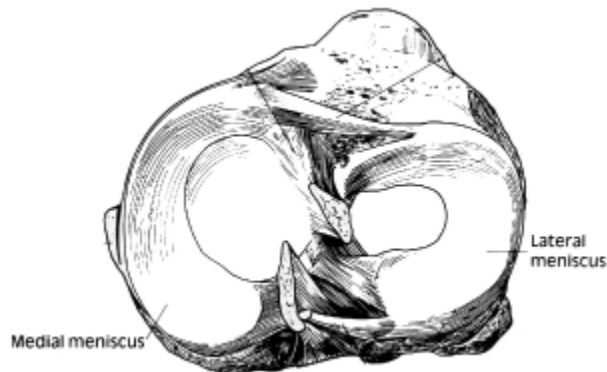


## Common Knee Problems

**Disclaimer:** The material presented on this page is general medical information and should not be considered medical advice.

### Meniscal Tears

A very common injury that is responsible for knee pain is a meniscal tear, or what is commonly known as a "torn cartilage". Each knee contains two menisci, one on the inside of the knee (medial) and one on the outside of the knee (lateral). The menisci were once thought to be functionless structures, but now we realize they have various important functions within the knee. The most important function is to act as shock absorbers for the knee joint. They are also responsible in making the knee more stable and for preventing arthritis.



The menisci can be torn when the knee is twisted and traps the meniscus between the thigh bone (femur) and the shin bone (tibia). The menisci can also be torn when the ligaments of the knee are stretched or torn. Normal aging causes the menisci to lose their rubbery or spongy consistency and can cause them to dehydrate and then fray much more easily.

When you tear your meniscus pain is usually felt in the knee. The knee often will get swollen and ache, and at times may feel like a stabbing knife-like pain. The knee might catch or lock and not straighten or bend as it normally does if there is a meniscus tear.

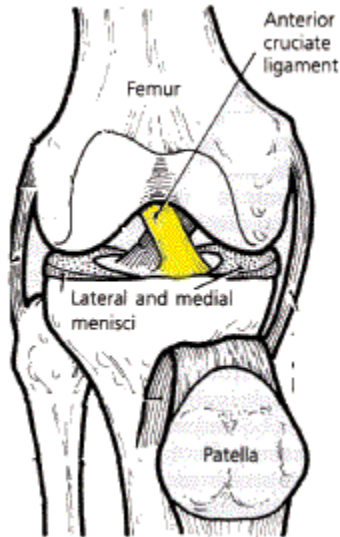
To diagnose a torn meniscus the doctor can examine the knee and by moving it in a specific way tell if the meniscus might be torn. The meniscus does not show on an X-ray but these tests are often done to see if arthritis or other injuries have occurred. Your doctor might order a magnetic resonance image or MRI to confirm the torn meniscus.

Once a torn meniscus is identified, many factors are taken into account to how best to treat the injury. If you think that you may have a meniscal tear or if you have knee pain for more than a month, you should see an orthopaedic surgeon. Various treatment options exist for meniscal tears including physical therapy, medication and rest. Surgical treatments utilize arthroscopy to either fix the torn piece or to take the torn portion out.

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## Anterior Cruciate Ligament Tears



Many famous and not so famous athletes have torn their anterior cruciate ligament or ACL. The ACL is a ligament that attaches the thigh bone (femur) to the shin bone (tibia) and helps stabilize the knee joint. This ligament is found in the inside of the knee joint and is responsible for preventing the tibia from slipping forward on the femur. It is like a thick rope and has pieces that work when the knee is bent and also when it is straight.

The ACL can be torn while doing almost any type of sporting activity. This injury most often occurs with a twisting injury to the knee. Many times the patient will be playing their sport and then will twist, hear or feel a pop and then fall to the ground. The pain is usually very bad and the athlete knows that something is not quite right with their knee. The injury often is so bad that the athlete cannot continue to play. The knee usually will swell within the first few hours after the injury. Patients with a torn ACL will often complain that their knee is loose or it just "gives out".

To diagnose a torn ACL a doctor who is familiar with knee injuries can examine the knee and by moving it in a specific way tell if the ACL is torn. The ACL does not show on X-rays but they are often taken to make sure there is not another injury. Your doctor might order a magnetic resonance image or MRI to see if the ACL is torn and if there are other injuries that can occur with a torn ACL. Any patient with an ACL tear should see a sports medicine orthopaedic surgeon. Not all patients will need surgery but many patients will need surgery to resume a normal lifestyle.

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## **Tendonitis**

Arthritis is a condition which results from the inflammation of a joint. While all the joints, including wrists, elbows and shoulders, are susceptible to arthritis, it is often more severe in the joints which bear the weight of the body that is, the knee, hip, and spine. Besides joint pain, other symptoms which may indicate arthritis include fever and weight loss.

There are over one hundred varieties of this condition. In many cases, pain management can be achieved by the use of such easily obtained over-the-counter remedies as aspirin, ibuprofen, acetaminophen, and naproxen. If your pain persists or restricts movement, you should consult your physician.

## **Sprains**

When a ligament is torn or stretched, the resulting injury is known as a sprain. A sprain is usually the result of twisting, and can occur at any joint. This injury is most common, however, in knees, wrists, and ankles. The primary symptoms are pain and swelling.

The best treatment for sprains is icing the affected area for fifteen to twenty minutes three or four times a day, plus using an anti-inflammatory drug such as ibuprofen or naproxen to reduce pain. An elastic bandage can also be very helpful. If pain and swelling continue to be a problem, or in the case of a knee or ankle sprain, if you cannot put weight on the affected leg, contact your physician.

## **Fractures**

Fractures, or broken bones, are most common in the limbs (arms and legs). Fractures can cause symptoms such as swelling, pain, discoloration of skin, or inability to move the affected limb. Swelling can be reduced by icing and elevating the limb. Broken bones are realigned by using either traction or a surgical procedure, and are then kept stationary by means of a splint or cast until the bone is able to mend.

Fractures can also occur in the skull or spine. Fractures in these areas are far more dangerous than limb fractures. If a spine or skull fracture is suspected, the victim should not be moved until professional medical assistance is available.

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