

## **Meniscus Tears**

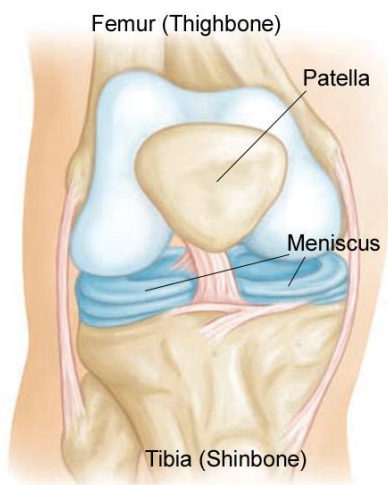
A meniscus tear is a common knee injury. The meniscus is a rubbery, C-shaped disk that acts as a "shock absorber" between the thighbone and shinbone. It helps cushion and stabilize the knee joint. Each knee has two menisci—one on the outside of the knee and one on the inside.

A meniscus tear is often caused by a single acute injury—such as a sudden twist or quick turn during sports activity. Because the menisci weaken and wear thin over time, older people are more likely to experience a degenerative meniscus tear.

### **Anatomy**

Three bones meet to form your knee joint: your thighbone (femur), shinbone (tibia), and kneecap (patella).

Two wedge-shaped pieces of cartilage act as "shock absorbers" between your thighbone and shinbone. These are called meniscus. They are tough and rubbery to help cushion the joint and keep it stable.



### **Description**

Menisci tear in different ways. Tears are noted by how they look, as well as where the tear occurs in the meniscus. Common tears include bucket handle, flap, and radial.

Sports-related meniscus tears often occur along with other knee injuries, such as anterior cruciate ligament tears.

### **Cause**

Sudden meniscus tears often happen during sports. Players may squat and twist the knee, causing a tear. Direct contact, like a tackle, is sometimes involved.

Older people are more likely to have degenerative meniscus tears. Cartilage weakens and wears thin over time. Aged, worn tissue is more prone to tears. Just an awkward twist when getting up from a chair may be enough to cause a tear, if the menisci have weakened with age.



## Treatment

How your orthopaedic surgeon treats your tear will depend on the type of tear you have, its size, and location.

The outside one-third of the meniscus has a rich blood supply. A tear in this "red" zone may heal on its own, or can often be repaired with surgery. A longitudinal tear is an example of this kind of tear.

In contrast, the inner two-thirds of the meniscus lacks a blood supply. Without nutrients from blood, tears in this "white" zone cannot heal. These complex tears are often in thin, worn cartilage. Because the pieces cannot grow back together, tears in this zone are usually surgically trimmed away.

Along with the type of tear you have, your age, activity level, and any related injuries will factor into your treatment plan.

### ***Nonsurgical Treatment***

**RICE.** The RICE protocol is effective for most sports-related injuries.

- Ice. Use cold packs for 20 minutes at a time, several times a day. Do not apply ice directly to the skin.
- Compression To prevent additional swelling
- Elevation. To reduce swelling, recline when you rest, and put your leg up higher than your heart.

Non-steroidal anti-inflammatory medicines. Ibuprofen reduces pain and swelling.

### ***Surgical Treatment***

If your symptoms persist with nonsurgical treatment, your doctor may suggest arthroscopic surgery.

**Procedure.** Knee arthroscopy is one of the most commonly performed surgical procedures. In it, a miniature camera is inserted through a small incision (portal). This provides a clear view of the inside of the knee. Your orthopaedic surgeon inserts miniature surgical instruments through other portals to trim or repair the tear.

- Partial meniscectomy. The damaged meniscus tissue is trimmed away.
- Meniscus repair. Some meniscus tears can be repaired by suturing (stitching) the torn pieces together. Whether a tear can be successfully treated with repair depends upon the type of tear. Recovery time for a repair is much longer than from a meniscectomy.

Rehabilitation time for a meniscus repair is about 3 months. A meniscectomy requires less time for healing — approximately 3 to 4 weeks. Meniscus tears are extremely common knee injuries. With proper diagnosis, treatment, and rehabilitation, patients often return to their pre-injury abilities.

