

KNEE PAIN

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ANTERIOR AND POSTERIOR CRUCIATE LIGAMENT INJURIES

The anterior and posterior cruciate ligaments are strong, tough stabilizers, which are located in the middle of the knee joint. The anterior cruciate ligament is most often stretched, torn, or both by a sudden twisting motion (for example, when the foot is planted one way and the knee is twisted the other way). The posterior cruciate ligament is most often injured by a direct impact, such as in an automobile accident or football tackle.

SYMPTOMS AND DIAGNOSIS

Injury to a cruciate ligament may or may not cause pain. The person may hear a popping sound, and the leg may buckle when he or she tries to stand on it. To diagnose an injury, a physiotherapist or doctor will perform several tests to see if the parts of the knee stay in proper position when pressure is applied in different directions. A thorough examination is essential to the diagnosis. An MRI test is very accurate in detecting a complete tear, but arthroscopy (or 'key-hole surgery') may be the only reliable means of detecting a partial tear.

TREATMENT

For an incomplete tear, the patient will begin an exercise program to strengthen surrounding muscles. The patient may also need a protective knee brace to wear during activity. For a completely torn anterior cruciate ligament in an active athlete and motivated patient, the doctor is likely to recommend surgery. The surgeon may reattach the torn ends of the ligament or reconstruct the torn ligament by using a graft. Regardless of whether surgery is needed or not, a full program of rehabilitation is essential.

MEDIAL AND LATERAL COLLATERAL LIGAMENT INJURIES

DESCRIPTION

The collateral ligaments are positioned on either side of the knee joint (medial on the inside, lateral on the outside). The medial collateral ligament (MCL) is more easily injured than the lateral collateral ligament (LCL). Injury to the MCL is most often caused by a blow to the outer side of the knee, which often happens in contact sports like football or hockey. This stretches and tears the ligament would be injured in the opposite way.

SYMPTOMS AND DIAGNOSIS

When injury to the MCL occurs, a person may feel a pop and the knee may buckle sideways. Pain and swelling are common. A thorough examination is essential to determine the nature and extent of injury. To diagnose a collateral ligament injury, the physiotherapist or doctor exerts pressure on the side of the knee to determine the degree of pain and looseness of the joint. An MRI may be helpful in diagnosing injuries to these ligaments.

TREATMENT

After any knee injury you should see a physiotherapist for a full program of rehabilitation. The program will be prescribed according to your particular injury and symptoms, and progressed as your symptoms decrease and the knee gets stronger. Exercises will include stretching or range of motion exercises, strengthening, and balance training with muscle balancing activities known as proprioception exercises. Physiotherapist may recommend a brace to improve knee stability. If surgery is needed, you will most likely be required to wear a brace during exercise or playing sports. Sometimes you need to wear your brace for years post surgery. Regardless of your injury, a good rehabilitation program can get you back to good health and function quickly and safely.