Cartilage (meniscus) tear

What is a meniscus?

The menisci are C-shaped tissues inside the knee joint, located between the thigh (femur) and shin (tibia) cartilage surfaces. There is one on the inside of the knee (medial) and one on the outside (lateral).

Menisci changes occur as a natural process as we age. However, most people remain pain free and are able to function normally despite this.

It is likely that pain develops as a result of the menisci being overloaded eg from overuse, with weight gain or after a traumatic event such as a twisting injury.

You may also experience noise such as clicking or grating when you move your knee. This is called crepitus. Crepitus is not a sign of joint damage and occurs in healthy joints too.

What are the symptoms of a degenerative meniscus?

- Pain, stiffness and/or swelling
- Locking of the knee
- Giving way

How is it diagnosed?

Diagnosis is made from your symptoms, the history of the problem, and an examination of your knee. Tests such as x-rays and scans are not usually required.

How is it treated?

- **Pain relief:** over the counter pain relief such as paracetamol and ibuprofen or anti-inflammatory gels may help you to continue exercising. A steroid injection may be offered if pain is a significant problem
- **Activity modification:** try to keep the knee moving within your limits of pain
- **Maintain a healthy weight**
- **Exercises:** to improve strength and flexibility

Physiotherapy is the most effective method of managing a painful but naturally ageing meniscus. Surgery is not usually indicated.

If you follow the advice and exercises on this leaflet, it is very likely that your symptoms will improve. However, this may take up to 12 weeks. If your symptoms do not improve after this period, please contact your clinician.
You may experience an initial increase in pain with these exercises. Do not worry, just do less repetitions next time and then gradually build up again. Your physiotherapist will guide you as to how many repetitions to do.

**Straight leg Raise:**
Affected leg outstretched. Tighten your thigh muscles and raise your leg 3 inches off the bed, keeping your knee as straight as possible.

**Calf stretch:**
In standing, affected leg behind unaffected leg. Both feet remain flat on the floor. Bend your front knee until you feel a stretch on affected leg.

**Knee bending**
Bend your leg as far as you can until you feel a stretch around your knee.

**Balance**
Stand on one leg

References:

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