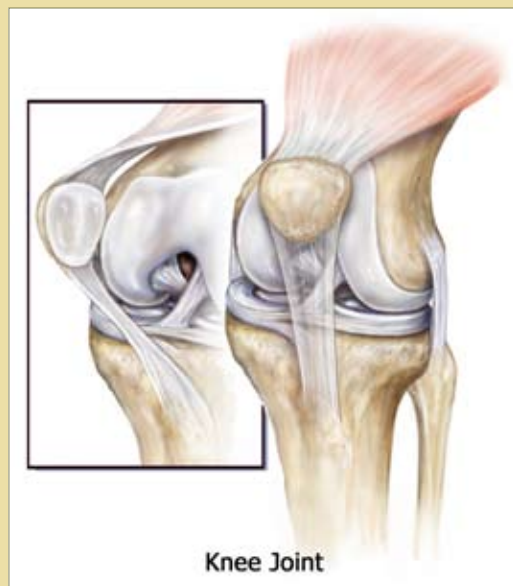


Understanding Knee Sprains



Anatomy

The knee is comprised of a complex assortment of bones, ligaments, cartilage and muscles. The three major bones of the knee are the femur (thigh bone), tibia (shin bone) and the patella (kneecap). In addition to being supported by the menisci and the joint capsule, the knee is stabilized by ligaments. These ligaments act to prevent movement when the knee is forced beyond its normal range of motion. The main four ligaments of the knee include the anterior cruciate ligament (ACL), the posterior cruciate ligament (PCL) and the medial and lateral collateral ligaments (MCL and LCL). A sprain is classified as a stretching and subsequent tearing to any one of these ligaments.



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Symptoms

The severity of your symptoms will depend on the degree of injury to the ligament. A first-degree sprain is a stretching of the ligament without any tearing of the tissue or significant laxity. A second-degree sprain is a stretching of the ligament with partial tearing of the fibers, resulting in mild to moderate laxity. Finally, a third degree sprain involves a complete rupture of the ligament and significant laxity.



Third Degree ACL Sprain

Patients with a knee ligament sprain typically have pain, swelling, tenderness, occasionally bruising and may have difficulty walking. The severity of these symptoms depend on the degree of the sprain.

Symptoms for knee injury are diverse in presentation and severity. The above should only be thought of as a generalization of the symptoms associated with this disorder.

Diagnosis

In order to determine the cause of your symptoms, your doctor will ask you questions and conduct a physical examination. X-ray is useful in viewing the bony anatomy of the knee and can help confirm or eliminate a specific diagnosis. After your doctor has conducted the examination, they may recommend that you undergo more diagnostic tests such as an MRI (magnetic resonance imaging) scan. An MRI allows your physician to clearly see the ligaments and cartilage of the knee and determine the extent of the injury.

All of these tests help your doctor determine the cause of your knee pain so that the most appropriate treatment plan is implemented.

Treatment

Treatment options are dependent upon which ligament is injured and the severity of the sprain. Exercises may be prescribed to you as well as therapy sessions with a Physical Therapist. In certain situations, anti-inflammatory medications and/or a cortisone injection can be beneficial in decreasing the pain and inflammation within the joint.

Braces can be worn to help support the ligament deficient knee. Initially, these braces may need to be worn more often, but as the knee strengthens and the ligaments heal their use becomes less vital. In certain instances, surgery is the most effective treatment. In conjunction with your doctor, you will agree on the treatment plan most appropriate for you.

For additional educational materials regarding this topic please visit our website, www.summitortho.com and click on the "Patient Education" quick link at the bottom of the page.

NOTES:

Ice is a convenient and inexpensive treatment option for knee pain. Placing a bag of ice directly on the knee for twenty minutes prevents swelling and inflammation from occurring inside the knee.



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