

Orthopaedic Connection

What The Heck Is Chondromalacia?

By Thomas J. Haverbush, M.D.
Orthopaedic Surgeon

Transforming patient information into patient understanding.

Come on now, be honest. If I told you that you had chondromalacia would you have a clue what I was talking about? I thought so.

You would probably be worried that it was a contagious disease or something that would cause an untimely death.

In fact, it is a very common condition in the joints of the body. Chondromalacia is probably most well known for its occurrence in the knee joint.

Articular Cartilage

The articular cartilage of your joints is a thick, somewhat rubbery, durable surface which covers the ends of all the bones that are true gliding joints. This articular cartilage surface is also called **hyaline cartilage**.

When articular (hyaline) cartilage becomes damaged or roughened, the term usually applied to it is chondromalacia. This literally means softening of the articular cartilage.

However, the articular cartilage surface does not just become soft. It can become very rough, irregular and scratchy. It can begin to wear down and become thinner like the tread on a tire wearing down. When it is completely worn down the underlying bone becomes exposed.

In The Beginning

In the very early stage of chondromalacia the surface of the joint has a slightly furry appearance. The friction caused by this change is great compared with the friction in a normal healthy joint. Friction in a normal joint is less than wet ice.

Chondromalacia can begin without any apparent reason. Frequently, however there may be a history of some type of injury to the knee or other joint, which could damage the articular surface of the joint. It can also occur if there exists some kind of subtle misalignment of the kneecap.

Perhaps for the most part people are just programmed genetically for their articular cartilage to wear out.

When chondromalacia appears, further deterioration can be expected over time. The time frame is very uncertain and can take months or even years to progress.

Symptoms

Pain in the anterior or front aspect of the knee is common. It may first be experienced with stair climbing. Sitting with the knee bent for a period of time can cause anterior knee pain.

Sometimes the first symptoms are a grinding or catching in the front of the knee under the kneecap. This symptom may or may not be painful.

A feeling of swelling in the front of the knee may be present.

Rarely, the knee may feel like it will give out at times.

While we are speaking mostly about the knee, it must be remembered that chondromalacia can affect any of our joints.

Perhaps this would be a good place to stop as I have much more to share with you about chondromalacia. Please come back to learn more about the management of the condition chondromalacia. It will be worth it, I promise.

In your spare time (if you have any!) log onto www.orthopodsurgeon.com for answers to all your burning questions about musculoskeletal stuff. Check it out.

Our goal is simple - To help people return to more pain free, functional lives.

Good health. Good life. All the best to you.

Be well.

Dr. Haverbush