

Argus Orthopaedic Zone

Knee Trouble: The Spectrum

By Thomas J. Haverbush, M.D.

Orthopaedic Surgeon

The last two weeks of our course on knee problems I explained that surgery isn't always needed and how I arrive at diagnoses.

Maybe it's time to introduce you to some of the knee problems that are frequently seen. This week I'm going to leave out knee problems resulting from trauma. We'll cover those later.

Lots of knee trouble just seems to come on over a period of time.

Knee cap (patellar) pain

Pain in the front of the knee is often due to some rough places under the kneecap. This is termed chondromalacia. Often there seems to be no particular cause, as it just seems to come on over time. Trauma can cause it also in some patients.

Plica

A painful band of tissue inside the knee joint usually in a young patient (teen). This band gets thick and inflamed and can cause pain and snapping.

Torn Cartilage (Meniscus)

You will be surprised to learn that most of the patients whom I see with torn cartilage have no history of injury. Cartilage is that infamous little shim or wedge of tissue in the knee that acts like a shock absorber. When it gets wear and tear changes in it, it can tear even at a fairly young age.

Arthritis

It is surprising how many people wear down the knee joint surface and then at some point begin to have pain. Certainly it is seen more often in older people, but sometimes people as young as 30 can be affected. When a knee begins to wear out it is like the tread on a tire wearing down.

Infection

This is a rarer form of knee trouble, but must always be considered if the pain comes on fairly suddenly. Swelling, tenderness and increased warmth are almost always present too. It can occur at any age.

Gout

Acute pain, swelling, tenderness. Can be confused with infection. More often seen in the feet. It almost always has a high uric acid value on blood test.

Knee Bursitis

A bursa is a protective little tissue sac over the kneecap. If it gets irritated for whatever reason, it swells up and looks like an egg on the front of the knee. It may not even be that painful. If it is painful and red it could be infected which is a serious problem.

Baker's Cyst

It is a fluid filled sac located in the back of the knee more toward the inner or medial side. The fluid always comes from the knee itself from some source of irritation and passes out through a channel into the back of the knee. If painful, it can be confused with a blood clot (DVT) in the back of the leg.

Hopefully this has given you an idea of some of the common things that go wrong with our knees.

We'll be spending more time in future articles talking also about knee injuries and how I treat all of this. Knees are one of the biggest areas I take care of as an Orthopaedic Surgeon.

For much more information log onto the office teaching website www.orthopodsurgeon.com, which can also take you to Your Orthopaedic Connection to learn about all the knee problems that I treat in the office and hospital.

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