

Argus Orthopaedic Zone

Patella Fracture, Ouch!

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Transforming patient information into patient understanding.

If you are unfortunate enough to break your patella (kneecap) you will probably say #!#*^!, not ouch! But you get the idea.

How It Occurs

The three most common ways are a fall directly on the kneecap, a fall from a height and striking an automobile dashboard.

Smashing the kneecap is bad enough, but as the thigh muscle (quad) contracts it pulls the pieces apart making things much worse.

Types of Fractures

Closed versus Open. If when you fell, the skin over the kneecap stayed intact at least one lucky thing happened. If the skin tore and there is bleeding you have an open fracture and bacteria from outside go pouring into your knee. Yikes! An already bad situation has gotten lots worse.

Simple versus Complex

Hopefully you are getting the picture that kneecap injuries are a complicated subject.

Simple or undisplaced fractures are those where the fracture can be seen on x-ray, but the pieces of bone (doctors call them fragments) are lined up very well.

Complex or displaced fractures (comminuted) occur often and result from a blow to the knee, but also from the quad muscle attached to the top of the kneecap contracting and pulling the pieces apart. When that happens, you and I are both having a bad day as the injury is very hard to fix.

Symptoms

Immediate severe pain occurs in most cases. The knee stays partly bent and it might be impossible to straighten the knee by your own power over and above the pain you have.

Swelling begins almost at once because the kneecap is vascular and bleeds readily filling the knee joint with blood. The bursa over the kneecap is also traumatized and swells and has a purplish appearance.

If you can straighten your knee under your own power (with pain of course) it doesn't mean you don't have a kneecap fracture. You still might.

Evaluation

I can't help you if you don't seek help. You know you are in a pickle, so head on over to the ER or an Urgent care.

You need a careful, thorough exam from hip to foot. And if you have fallen from a height your pelvis and lumbar spine need attention too.

If there is any bleeding coming from the front of the knee other than a scrape, it may be coming from the fracture which makes it a serious problem. It really should be evaluated at that time by a surgeon, not just the ER personnel.

I have much more to cover about this serious injury so I will continue next week. Won't you please come back? See you then.

Argus Orthopaedic Zone Archive and Office Website

What if there was a whole world of musculoskeletal information at one place? There is!

www.orthopodsurgeon.com opens up for you the office website, Your Orthopaedic Connection and the Archive of all previous Argus articles I have written for you, your family and friends.

Please check it out. Do yourself a favor.

Be well.

Dr. Haverbush