

Argus Orthopaedic Zone

Patella Fracture, Now What?

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Transforming patient information into patient understanding.

Last time I finished saying that if there is any bleeding coming from the front of the knee you could have an open fracture.

This is very serious because unless it is just a superficial scrape, the bleeding is coming from the kneecap. Bacteria from your skin and any contamination go into the bone and your knee joint. BIG PROBLEM.

Exam

Careful exam of the entire leg or lower extremity as we refer to it. Other nearby things can be injured too.

I always do several x-rays. Sometimes a CT scan is needed to further evaluate the fracture. MRIs are hardly ever needed.

Treatment

It depends entirely on how serious or complicated the fracture is.

Fractures that are in good position or alignment can be managed in a straight knee immobilizer and crutches. Surgery is rarely needed for this kind of fracture.

Separated fracture. When the fracture pieces are pulled apart, that spells trouble with a capital T.

Fractures that are not in a very good position usually require surgery. There are several ways that I might use to treat a patella fracture. Often metal of some type (pins, wire, screws) is placed to hold the fracture together while healing occurs.

Partial Removal

A patella that breaks is sometimes in one big piece and many smaller pieces. I see this a lot. What I do next is to remove all the small pieces that are too small to repair and reattach the ligament tissue to the large piece. You can get along with part of a kneecap if necessary.

It is extremely unusual to have to remove the entire kneecap.

Healing Time

I always squirm when patients ask how long the broken kneecap will take to heal. It is very hard to predict. Four to six weeks for an extremely simple fracture up to several months for a complicated one.

Probably much of the time spent in a long knee immobilizer, then a brace.

Crutches are required for most of the time. In other words you are laid up for a long time, unfortunately.

The Outcome

If you eventually heal with near normal function you are really lucky. That means the bone pieces have united AND the surface of the kneecap inside your knee is smooth. That is rare because there are usually small cracks and irregularities in the patella joint surface. This can lead to arthritis changes that develop in the knee over time (months or years).

Arthroscopic surgery is needed at times to treat this problem.

Boy, you can really save yourself a bunch of trouble by not breaking your kneecap in the first place. I can help you if you do. It is an injury I see frequently.

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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.

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Be well.

Dr. Haverbush