

MENISCAL TEAR

Commonly known as a torn cartilage, a meniscal tear is damage to the meniscus that sits within your knee joint. The knee meniscus is a half moon shaped fibrocartilage structure that sits towards the outside of the knee joint.

Your meniscus assists with the rotational stability of your knee and shock absorption. Some symptoms of a meniscus tear include knee pain, swelling, catching or locking and a restricted range of motion.

Why does it happen?

Acute meniscal tears usually occur when the knee rotates in a flexed position, for example changing direction or twisting. This is common in sports such as football, netball and basketball. Acute pain is generally felt at the time of the injury and swelling often appears a few hours later. In the older adult meniscus tears may occur due to age related degeneration and wear and tear.

What can a physiotherapist do?

The physiotherapist will determine the extent of your meniscus injury, assess contributing factors and complete a biomechanical assessment. Your physiotherapist can provide education and advice regarding rest, ice, elevation and compression in the early stages of the injury and will also be able to inform you as to whether further imaging is required.

The physiotherapist may also employ other treatments such as electrotherapy modalities, soft tissue massage, stretching, range of motion and strengthening exercises. They may also suggest the use crutches and/or a brace. High level sports specific and functional exercises such as jumping, hopping and twisting should be completed at the later stages of rehabilitation.

What about sport/work?

Return to sport and work can vary depending on the type of work or sport you perform, the extent of your injury and the management undertaken. Your physiotherapist will be able to discuss this with you further.

Outcome

Most meniscal injuries settle well with adequate rehabilitation and time. Large meniscal tears - particularly those that cause the knee to lock or block movement - or those that do not improve with treatment may require a surgical opinion for an arthroscope.

Mild to moderate meniscus tears: 4 to 8 Weeks
Large meniscus tears: 8+ weeks - may require a surgical opinion

Arthroscopic surgery: knee locked or blocked movement, or tears that have failed to settle with conservative management.

