

Hip Labral Tear

What You Need to Know

What Is a Hip Labral Tear?

The labrum is a ring of tough cartilage that lines the rim of the hip socket, deepening it and helping to keep the ball of the femur securely in place. It also acts as a seal for the joint fluid that lubricates and nourishes the cartilage. When the labrum tears, it can cause pain, clicking, and a feeling of instability in the hip — and over time it can accelerate cartilage damage if not addressed.

What Does It Feel Like?

- A deep aching pain in the groin or front of the hip — often described as a "C" shape with the thumb and fingers
- Clicking, catching, or locking sensation in the hip with movement
- Pain that worsens with prolonged sitting, walking, or pivoting
- Stiffness and limited hip rotation — difficulty crossing the leg or getting into a car
- Pain at the end range of hip flexion (bringing the knee toward the chest)
- A feeling that the hip is "giving way" or unstable

What Causes a Labral Tear?

- Hip impingement (FAI) — abnormal bony shapes that repeatedly pinch and damage the labrum
- Traumatic injury — a sudden pivoting, twisting, or impact force
- Repetitive strain — ballet dancers, hockey players, runners, and golfers are at higher risk
- Hip dysplasia — a shallow socket places excessive stress on the labrum
- Age-related degeneration

Surgery vs. Physical Therapy

Many hip labral tears — particularly smaller or degenerative ones — improve significantly with PT alone. Surgical repair (arthroscopic labral repair) is considered when symptoms are

severe and have not improved with a dedicated conservative program, particularly when FAI is present.

When Should I Be Concerned?

- Significant locking or true giving way of the hip joint
- Inability to bear weight due to pain
- Progressive worsening despite PT

The Good News

Many patients with hip labral tears achieve excellent pain relief and function with physical therapy. Treatment focuses on strengthening the deep hip stabilizers, improving movement mechanics, and reducing the forces that stress the labrum during daily activities. Even after surgical repair, PT is the key to a full recovery.

Most patients experience significant improvement within **6 to 12 weeks** of dedicated physical therapy.

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