

Recovering From Knee Arthroscopic Surgery

What You Need to Know

What Is Knee Arthroscopy?

Knee arthroscopy is a minimally invasive surgical procedure in which a small camera (arthroscope) and thin surgical instruments are inserted through tiny incisions around the knee. This allows the surgeon to both diagnose and treat problems inside the joint without opening the knee fully. It is one of the most commonly performed orthopedic surgeries in the United States.

Common reasons for knee arthroscopy include:

- Meniscus repair or partial meniscectomy (removal of torn tissue)
- Removal of loose bodies (fragments of bone or cartilage floating in the joint)
- Cartilage repair or microfracture procedures
- ACL or PCL reconstruction
- Treatment of synovitis (inflamed joint lining)
- Lateral release (cutting a tight band of tissue to improve kneecap tracking)

What Can I Expect After Surgery?

Days 1–7: Immediate recovery

- Swelling and soreness are normal — often more than patients expect
- Ice and elevation are essential — aim for 20 minutes every 2 hours
- Walking is usually permitted immediately, with or without crutches depending on the procedure
- Keep incision sites dry and watch for signs of infection

Weeks 2–4: Restoring motion and early strength

- Physical therapy begins — range of motion exercises and gentle strengthening
- Swelling begins to subside with activity management
- Stationary cycling may begin

Weeks 4–12+: Progressive return to function

- Strengthening progresses — quads, hamstrings, hip, calf
- Functional activities reintroduced based on procedure type
- Return to sport timelines vary: 6 weeks for minor procedures, 9–12 months for ACL reconstruction

What Precautions Should I Follow?

- Follow your surgeon's specific weight-bearing instructions — these vary by procedure
- Keep incisions dry until fully healed (typically 1–2 weeks)
- Do not drive until off narcotic pain medications and cleared by your surgeon
- Avoid submersion in pools, hot tubs, or baths until incisions are healed
- Watch for blood clot symptoms: calf pain, redness, or swelling

When Should I Be Concerned?

- Increasing rather than decreasing pain after the first few days
- Fever or signs of infection at the incision sites
- Calf pain, redness, or swelling — possible blood clot
- Sudden loss of motion that was previously gained
- A new pop, give-way, or locking of the knee

How Physical Therapy Helps

Recovery from arthroscopic surgery varies significantly based on the procedure performed. Your physical therapist will tailor your program specifically to what was done, progressing you safely through each phase. Starting PT promptly, reducing swelling effectively, and restoring strength and motion on the right timeline are the key factors in achieving the best possible outcome.

Recovery timelines range from **6 weeks to 12 months** depending on the procedure — your PT will guide you at every stage.

This information is for general educational purposes only and is not a substitute for a professional evaluation. Call us today — we have immediate openings with no waitlist.

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