

Arthroscopic Knee Surgery

What is arthroscopic knee surgery?

Arthroscopic [ahr-thruh-SKOP-ik] **knee surgery** is surgery to diagnose, remove, and/or repair damaged tissue in your knee. The surgeon inserts an **arthroscope** [AHR-thruh-skohp], which is a tiny camera, into your knee. The camera lets the surgeon project a large picture of your knee to a screen for a closer look at what could be damaged. The surgeon can then make small incisions (cuts) and insert tools to repair or remove any damaged tissue.

With arthroscopic surgery, you will have anesthesia to help you relax and feel less pain. You will likely go home the day of surgery. The recovery period after arthroscopic surgery and what you can expect long-term, depend on your knee problems, general physical condition, and other factors.

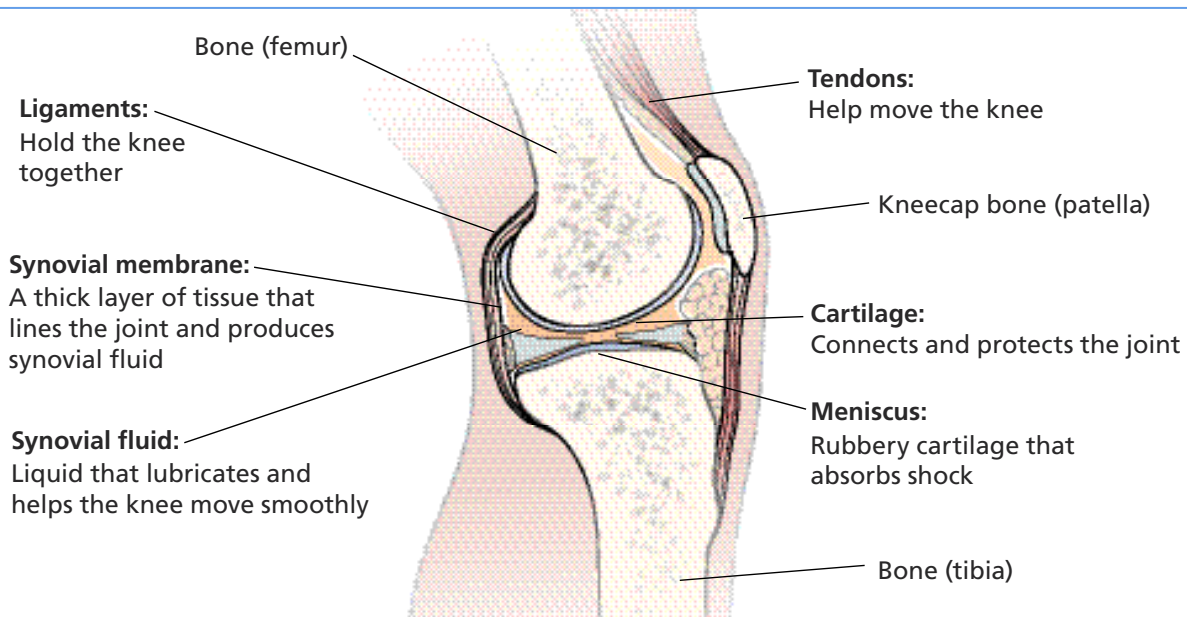
What do I need to do next?

- 1 Review the information in this handout about what happens before, during, and after arthroscopic knee surgery.
- 2 Talk with your doctor about the benefits, risks, and alternatives in your specific situation ([see page 2](#)).
- 3 Get ready for your surgery using the information on [page 2](#).

Why do I need it?

Arthroscopic surgery may be recommended if your knee is injured or worn out, causes continuous pain or swelling, or if it “catches” or gives way. The surgery can diagnose, remove, and/or repair damage in the areas shown in the picture below.*

Parts of the knee typically repaired with arthroscopic knee surgery



*For more detailed images visit the [American Academy of Orthopaedic Surgeons](#) website.

What are the risks and benefits?

Talk with your doctor about your surgery, including the most common benefits, risks, and alternatives. Other benefits and risks may apply in your unique medical situation. The conversation you have with your doctor is the most important part of learning about your surgery and what to expect.

Possible benefits	Possible risks and complications	Alternatives
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• More accurate diagnosis because the arthroscope provides a better picture of what's wrong with your knee.• Faster recovery than with surgery involving larger incisions.• Very small scars that don't interfere with movement.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Bleeding or wound infection are risks of any surgery. There is a small risk, but antibiotics and following care instructions help to prevent these.• Failure to relieve all of your symptoms despite best possible results for the surgery.• A blood clot in a deep vein (DVT), which is rare and treatable.	<p>Arthroscopic knee surgery is usually done when non-surgical options have not helped. These can include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Activity modification• Knee wraps or other supports• Physical therapy• Medicines



Preparing for your surgery checklist

- Make a list of all of your medicines and bring it to your surgery appointment.** Be sure to include all prescriptions, inhalers, patches, vitamins, herbal remedies, and over-the-counter drugs (such as allergy medicine or cough syrup) you are taking.
- Follow your doctor's instructions concerning your medicines.** You may need to stop taking certain medicines a few days before surgery.
- Tell your doctor if you're allergic** to any medicines, have a rash or infection near your knee, or if you have ever had any bad reactions to anesthesia.
- Follow all instructions on when to stop eating or drinking before your surgery.** This will help prevent complications from the anesthesia.
- Arrange for someone to take you home** after surgery and stay with you the first 24 hours after your surgery.
- Ask your doctor to explain** all of the possible risks and complications of arthroscopic knee surgery.
- Arrange for time off work with your employer.** Your doctor will tell you how long you may need to be off work depending on the type of physical activity your job requires.
- Wear comfortable clothing.** Wear clothes that are loose, easy to get on and off, and can fit over a thick bandage.
- Bring any assistive devices you have** (such as a walker, knee brace, or crutches). Your doctor will give you advice on using them after surgery.

What happens before the surgery?

You'll be given anesthesia so you don't feel pain during surgery. A doctor who specializes in pain control, an anesthesiologist [an-uh-s-thee-zee-OL-uh-jist], will explain what to expect for the type of anesthesia you will be given, such as:

- **General anesthesia:** Medicine delivered through an IV or mask that keeps you asleep and pain free.
- **Regional anesthesia:** Medicine delivered to the nerves around your spine that blocks sensation in your legs. You'll be awake but will be given a sedative to make you sleepy and relaxed.
- **Local anesthesia:** Medicine injected to block all sensation in your knee. You'll be awake but will be given a sedative to make you sleepy and relaxed.

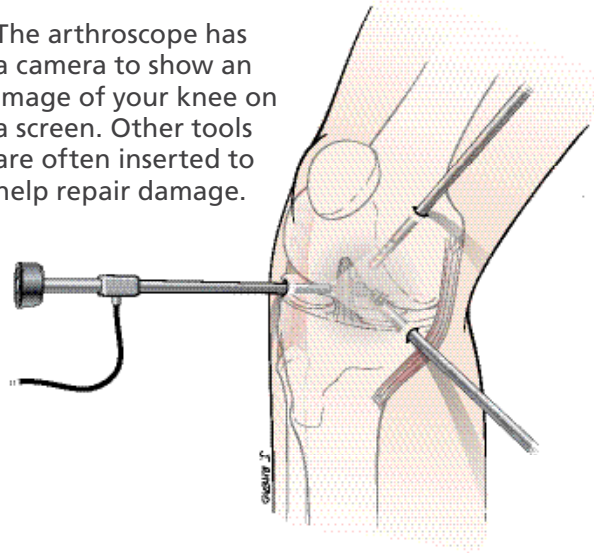
You will mark your knee before the surgery to make sure that the correct knee is repaired.

What happens during surgery?

The surgery usually lasts between 30 and 90 minutes. Here is what happens:

- 1 The anesthesiologist will give you anesthesia. You may have an IV line attached to your hand or arm.
- 2 After making 1 or 2 tiny incisions (cuts) in your skin, the surgeon will flush your knee with clean fluid. This will lessen any bleeding and expand your knee so the images can be clearer.
- 3 The surgeon will insert the arthroscope, so the inside of your knee shows on a video monitor. The surgeon will use the arthroscope to look at areas of your knee and diagnose the problem.
- 4 The surgeon may make more incisions to insert small tools. These will be used to repair damaged tissues or remove loose fragments of bone and cartilage.
- 5 At the end of the surgery, the surgeon will drain the clean fluid from your knee and close the cuts with stitches or surgical tape. A bandage may be placed over the cuts.

The arthroscope has a camera to show an image of your knee on a screen. Other tools are often inserted to help repair damage.



What happens after surgery?

Here's what you can expect after surgery:

- **Recovery room.** Nurses will watch your vital signs (temperature, pulse, breathing rate, and blood pressure) for 1 or 2 hours in a recovery room. You'll be able to go home as soon as your vital signs are good, you are fully awake, and you can move to a chair or stand and walk.
- **Home instructions.** The nurses or medical team will discuss the outcome of your surgery and instructions for caring for yourself at home. You may not remember this information. Have a friend or family member take notes. Ask your surgeon for a copy of the Intermountain fact sheet, **Arthroscopic Knee Surgery: Home care instructions.**
- **Physical therapy.** Your doctor may recommend physical therapy. A physical therapist can create and supervise a program of specific exercises to increase your flexibility, strength, and balance. Physical therapy also includes a variety of treatments to reduce scar tissue, promote healing, and help prevent future injuries.



Questions for my doctor

Notes

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