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SPORTS

Weak Knee May Signal Tear

Editor's note: *Amon Ferry, a Harvard sports medicine fellowship-trained orthopedic surgeon who is certified by the American Board of Orthopedic Surgeons, is the new sports-medicine columnist for Republic community sections. He has extensive experience working with athletes and professional teams.*

Do you have a noisy knee that sometimes gives out on you? If so, you may have a meniscus tear.

There are two types of cartilage inside the knee, the protective cartilage on the end of the bone (articular cartilage) and the cushion between the two bones (fibrocartilage). This fibrocartilage cushion is smooth and rubbery and is termed the meniscus. It is C-shaped, attaches to the upper end of the shin bone (tibia), and comes in a pair, medial and lateral. The meniscus functions to protect the articular cartilage by decreasing the contact force across the joint.

A meniscal tear can occur after a traumatic injury like a fall, but may also occur while walking. The meniscus typically tears after a twisting injury on a bent knee. Some may hear a pop, others may not recall any injury at all.

How do you know if you have a meniscal tear? The three hallmark symptoms are pain on the side of the knee, swelling, and pain when bending the knee. Often, with rest the knee feels better, but with activity the pain



**Sports
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returns. Some may even feel that there is something loose inside the knee or that that knee gives way.

Treatment for meniscal tears starts like most injuries: rest, ice and anti-inflammatory medications. Younger, active people do not tolerate meniscus tears

very well and often go on to surgery. If the symptoms do not improve over a period of a few weeks, you may want to seek evaluation by an orthopedic surgeon that specializes in arthroscopic surgery. Surgical treatment for meniscal tears depends on your age. In people younger than 30, an arthroscopic meniscal repair may be possible. After the age of 30 there is limited blood supply to the meniscus which means that once it tears, there is little chance for it to heal. If symptoms persist after conservative treatment, these tears often have to be removed surgically. The recovery depends on the amount of work that has to be done, but most people are able to get back to their activities within a few weeks.

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