

KNEE

Knee Arthroscopy

Knee arthroscopy is a minimally invasive (keyhole) surgery used to look inside and treat problems in the knee joint. Instead of a large incision, the surgeon uses a small camera (arthroscope), tiny instruments, and very small incisions — allowing diagnosis and treatment with less pain and a faster recovery than open surgery.

Why it might be recommended

- Meniscus tears
- Loose pieces of cartilage or bone in the knee
- Knee locking or catching
- Ongoing knee pain or swelling that hasn't improved
- Certain ligament injuries
- Cartilage damage
- Infection or inflammation inside the knee

It is often considered after imaging (such as MRI) and physical therapy have not fully resolved symptoms.

What happens during the procedure

You are given anesthesia (general or spinal), and the surgeon makes two to three small incisions around the knee. A camera shows the inside of the knee on a screen, and the surgeon may trim or repair a torn meniscus, smooth damaged cartilage, remove loose fragments, or wash out the joint. The procedure usually takes 30 to 60 minutes, and most patients go home the same day — occasionally an overnight stay is needed.

Recovery

In the first few days, mild to moderate pain and swelling are common, managed with pain relief, ice, elevation, and crutches for a short time if needed.

- Walking: usually within 1–2 days
- Return to work (desk job): 1–2 weeks
- Return to work (physical job): 4–6 weeks
- Sports: usually 4–12 weeks, depending on what was done

Physical therapy is often recommended to help restore strength, movement, and stability.

Benefits

Smaller scars, less pain than open surgery, faster recovery, improved knee movement, and relief from locking or catching symptoms.

Risks

Knee arthroscopy is generally safe, but risks include rare infection, very uncommon blood clots, swelling or stiffness, ongoing pain, and temporary numbness around the incisions. Your surgeon will explain these risks before surgery.

Will arthroscopy cure my knee problem?

It depends on the underlying cause. Mechanical problems — such as meniscus tears or loose bodies — often improve well, while arthritis-related pain may improve only temporarily, or not at all. Your surgeon will discuss realistic expectations with you.

Key takeaway

Knee arthroscopy is a common and safe keyhole surgery used to diagnose and treat knee problems. Recovery is usually quick but varies depending on what was treated, and physical therapy plays an important role in the outcome.