

'Tis the Season of Knee Ligaments

We have been spending the last few weeks around the knee joint. Since we are in the midst of Fall sports, I think we should stay with the knee awhile longer.

Any doctor seeing sports injuries (me!) will tell you that knee injuries are a big problem. The knee is so vulnerable because it is out in the middle of the leg balanced by ligaments with no muscles surrounding it for support. The poor knee envies the hip joint at the other end of the femur, which has strong muscles covering it. Hip injuries to the joint itself are rare compared to the frequently injured knee. This probably has something (not the only thing) to do with why we do 7 - 8 times as many total knee as hip replacements!

Ligaments

Do you really know what your ACL is and what it does? The letters have become very common in the vocabulary of our patients. It stands for anterior cruciate ligament. To simplify things, think of the knee as supported by two sets of ligaments. Ligaments (totally different from tendons!) function like short ropes to hold the knee together during bending and straightening.

Cruciate ligaments, anterior and posterior located deep in the knee comprise one set. Cruciate ligaments cross each other in the knee, one arising near the front of the knee and one arising from the back or posterior aspect. They prevent the shin bone or tibia from sliding forward and backward on the femur.

The other two knee ligaments are the collateral ligaments, medial and lateral which control side to side movement of the knee joint.

Anterior cruciate ligament knee injuries are very common during sports. Why you ask? Read on.

How the ACL is injured

It can happen in several ways, but these are the most common ways.

1. Cutting, meaning to change direction rapidly
2. Suddenly stopping
3. Landing from a jump as in gymnastics
4. Direct collision driving the tibia backwards.

Symptoms of ACL injury

Injured persons frequently report hearing a snap.

Pain may be severe or slight.

Swelling (blood) in the knee occurs in one or two hours and increases overnight.

The knee feels unstable and weak and will not support full weight.

Diagnosis of ACL injury

As with anything else I do, starting with a careful history and physical exam is the most important part. There are several tests I can do when the knee is examined to tell me if there is an ACL injury.

The third thing to do is order plain x-rays of the knee to be sure there is no hidden fracture. More recently MRI x-rays of the knee have been used extensively to aid in the accuracy of the diagnosis.

Management of ACL injury

Having run out of space for this week I will continue next time with information about how the injury is treated depending on the findings.

All Orthopaedic Surgery problems can be evaluated by Dr. Haverbush at the Lakeview Community Wellness Center in Lakeview or at the office in Alma at 315 Warwick Dr., Alma, Michigan.

Please call 989-463-6092 for information or to schedule an appointment.

Future Lakeview Community Wellness Center Clinic dates are October 3, October 17 and November 1, 2008

Please don't forget there is a wealth of accurate information about ACL injuries and all the other Orthopaedic conditions I treat on the office teaching website www.orthopodsurgeon.com. Please log on and check it out.

We are happy to answer questions from readers. You can e-mail me at orthopodsurgeon@hotmail.com or write to me at 315 Warwick Dr., Alma, Michigan 48801.

Our goal is simple - To help people return to more pain free functional lives.

Be well.

Dr. Haverbush