

# Meniscus Tear

## What is it?

The meniscus is a C-shaped cushion, unique to the knee joint, that helps to protect the cartilage lining of the bones. There are two on each knee: the lateral (outer) and the medial (inner). The meniscus is located between the two bones of the knee joint and it helps the round femur (thigh bone) glide smoothly with the flat tibia (shin bone). Sometimes the meniscus can tear and cause pain and discomfort. Tears can happen due to an injury or fall, but not always; sometimes the meniscus tears occur simply due to the wear of everyday activities. Meniscus tears—especially the degenerative or non-traumatic type—increase with age regardless of activity level.

## Natural History

The meniscus can tear in many different places and in many different ways, so patients can experience a variety of symptoms. Most patients with meniscus tears experience some of the following symptoms: pain, swelling, stiffness, decreased range of motion, locking of the knee joint, and a feeling of instability. These symptoms are a result of the torn, non-functional piece of meniscus getting pulled in between the two bones of the knee. This pulling can cause swelling, pain, and even further damage to the knee cartilage. When the torn piece gets caught between the bones the knee can lock temporarily.

## Treatment Options

To diagnose a meniscus tear your doctor will examine your knee and possibly order an MRI, which can show a tear. When determining the correct treatment for a meniscus tear the patient's lifestyle, age, and the location of the tear must be taken into account. Depending on their desired activity level, some people are able to live relatively well with a torn meniscus. In many teens and children the meniscus has enough blood supply that it can heal or be surgically repaired with stitches. However, for the wide majority of adults the meniscus is not repairable due to its poor blood supply, and arthroscopic surgery is recommended to remove the torn piece. Meniscus surgery is one of the most common and effective

surgeries performed on knees. Cutting out the damaged meniscus stops the pain, locking, and swelling, and many patients are able to return to their activities at the same level as before the tear. For more details about meniscus surgery and recovery, visit [millsteinorthopedics.com](http://millsteinorthopedics.com).