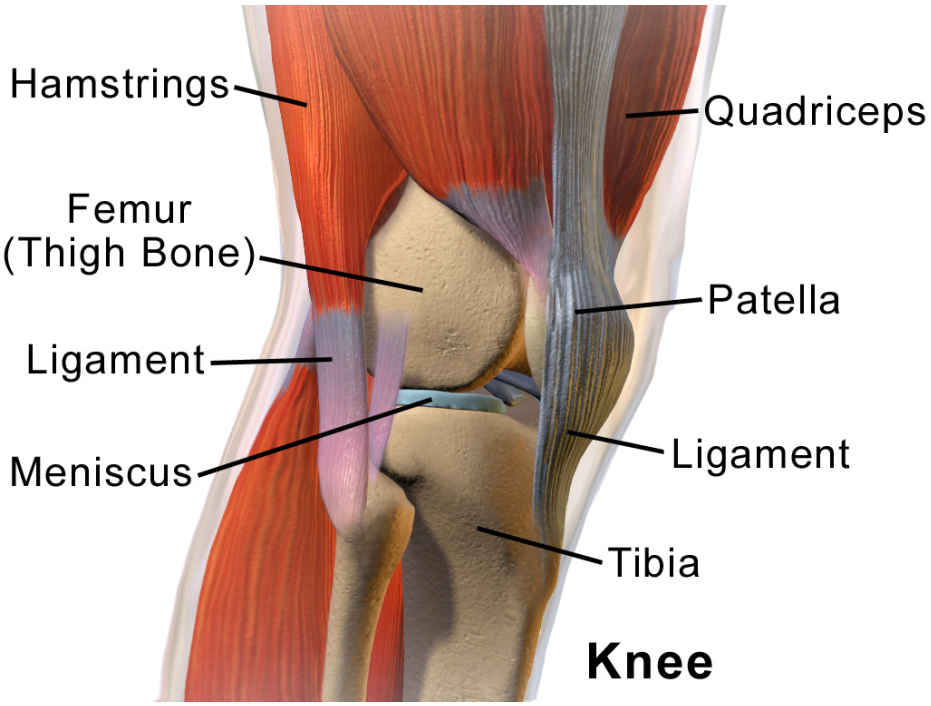
Meniscus tears





What is a meniscus?

A meniscus is a horseshoe-shaped piece of cartilage that forms part of your knee joint. It sits between the bottom end of your thigh bone (femur) and the top end of your shin bone (tibia). We have two meniscus in each knee – one on the inside of the knee (medial meniscus) and one on the outside (lateral meniscus).



The meniscus act as cushions or shock absorbers between your femur and tibia bones and help to ensure that the two bones fit together comfortably.

What causes a meniscus to tear?

A meniscus classically tears when the knee joint is subjected to a sudden, forceful twisting or a deep squat with a heavy load.

Sometimes, this is preceded by a gradual straining of the meniscus due to overuse – when you've really worked it hard in a way that it didn't want to be worked, over a long period of time, or by repetitive straining due to poor biomechanics. In these cases, it can be a very simple movement that finally does it.

But a healthy meniscus can also be injured by a sudden, traumatic movement, for example when you fall and twist your knee; we class this as an acute injury.

Will a meniscus tear heal?

The reason many people ask this is because they read on the Internet that a meniscus cannot heal because it has such poor blood supply.

Well, nothing in a joint has a good blood supply, but joint injuries generally do heal. A joint relies on synovial fluid instead of blood to supply it with nutrients

and take away waste products. And for the synovial fluid to do its thing, the joint needs to move. Therefore, you don't need a massive blood supply to get your meniscus functional again, you just need a graded exercise plan and the right nutrients (balanced diet).

We don't really know whether a tear in a meniscus always knits together again. How well it has healed is judged based on how much your symptoms have improved. The evidence also suggests that a meniscus tear doesn't have to knit together for you to have a fully functional and pain free knee.

Meniscus tear recovery time

A meniscus injury can take a long time to get better.

A mild meniscus tear – especially for younger people – can get better in about four to twelve weeks. But for older people (anyone over the age of 35!!) it can usually takes three to six months, but often even longer.

Something that can really increase your recovery time is if you're trying to force the pace with your rehab. If you overdo it with how many repetitions you're doing or using too much weight, you can actually aggravate your pain and delay your recovery. Therefore, it's quite important to get some guidance on the right level of exercise for you.

So, in summary, recovery times for meniscus tears can vary quite dramatically, but as long as you're seeing small improvements it means that rehab will likely work for you.

Conservative treatment for a torn meniscus

A well-rounded conservative treatment plan for meniscus tears has these elements:

1. Relative rest
2. Rehab exercises
3. Cross-training

Relative rest

Relative rest – as opposed to total rest – involves starting to use your knee joint gently as soon as possible after you've injured it while avoiding movements that cause additional pain.

This is because your joint needs some movement to get that synovial fluid in and out to help your meniscus recover.

However, there are some movements and activities that are likely to increase your pain and delay recovery, and which we advise our patients to avoid during the early stages of recovery:

- Twisting movements of the leg. So, for example, if you want to swivel around while standing. Rather move your feet with your upper body.
- Deep squatting or kneeling.
- Walking on uneven terrain or steep downhills.
- Walking or standing for long periods. Your injured meniscus needs time to regain its strength and endurance and it won't yet be able to tolerate long periods of weight bearing. If you find that your knee is significantly more swollen or uncomfortable in the late afternoons or evenings, then it may be that you're doing too much.

Rehabilitation exercises

Rehab exercises for meniscus tears should progress in tandem with your injury's recovery pace.

During the early stage of recovery, the exercises should consist of low-load repetitive movements; the aim is to feed the joint, improve range of motion, and activate the muscles that support the knee and control your leg.

In the later stages of rehab, when your knee is able to tolerate greater load, the exercises should slowly increase in intensity and complexity until you've regained the full strength and control required of your sport, work or lifestyle. It should include exercises that:

- Strengthen the muscles around the knee.
- Strengthen the muscles that improve your leg control.
- Strengthen your core muscles.
- Improve your position sense, which is your brain's awareness of and ability to control your leg without you having to look at it.

Cross-training

Any activity that involves low-load, repetitive movements of the knee can be a useful cross-training option to help your recovery. The most common two are cycling and swimming.

Cycling with a meniscus tear

Cycling can be a good cross-training option for most, although not all people, who have a meniscus tear. If your knee feels uncomfortable, check whether it makes a difference if you adjust your saddle (higher is often better) or where you place your feet on the pedals. Often, the knee feels quite stiff and uncomfortable when you start pedalling and then improves as you continue.

If you have only recently suffered a meniscus injury and want to include cycling for cross-training, we suggest that you use a stationary bike because:

- It is easier to control your movements and the resistance against which you pedal.
- You may reinjure yourself if you have to stop suddenly while cycling out on the roads.



Your knee should not feel worse after you've cycled, and you should not experience actual pain while cycling.

Swimming with a torn meniscus

Swimming is a excellent way to improve your all round fitness within your rehab programme. We wholly support swimming but….. do NOT do breast stroke – the circular movement of the legs will likely aggravate your injury.



Squeeze a flotation device between your legs to prevent you from kicking if your knee feels uncomfortable when you kick. You can start doing freestyle once you feel your knee is fine with straight-line kicking.

If you need more help with your injury, You're welcome to make an appointment for an on-line consultation via video call, or visit us at our clinic for an assessment of your injury and a tailored treatment plan.