

Common Knee Terms Used by your Doctor

Achilles tendon: the strongest tendon in the body that connects the calf muscles to the heel bone

Allograft (of cartilage or ligaments): transplant of frozen cartilage or ligaments from a donor

Ambulation: walking

Anesthesia: a drug that causes a patient to lose sensation or consciousness so that surgery can be performed without any pain: can be “local,” in which case only the region being operated on becomes numb, “regional,” in which everything below the waist becomes numb, or “general,” in which the patient will be put to sleep

Anterior Cruciate Ligament (ACL): a ligament that connects the femur to the tibia; it helps stabilize the knee and stops the tibia from extending past the femur

Arthritis: a disease in which the joints become inflamed, causing pain and stiffness

Arthrogram: injection of a radioactive substance in order to take a radiograph of a joint

Arthroscopy: a minimally invasive surgery in which one looks inside a joint with a fiber-optic scope and can perform procedures

Articular cartilage: see Cartilage

Autograft (of cartilage or ligaments): transplant of cartilage or ligaments from one part of the patient’s body to another

Blood clot: a mass of gelled blood cells

Bone spurs: abnormal bone projections that grow off of joints

Buckling (of the knee): when the knee folds or “gives way,” causing temporarily loss of control in the leg

Bursa sac: a small, fluid-filled sac made of tissue that creates surfaces for smooth motion



Cartilage: a type of connective tissue that covers joint surfaces, cushions the bones, and absorbs shock

Degenerative tear: a tear that usually occurs when cartilage weakens and thins over time; becomes more prone to tear from simple motion

Dislocation: when a joint has slipped completely out of place

Distal: used to describe something that is situated away from the center of the body, such as a limb

Femoral condyles: two large bone projections that stem from the bottom of the femur; the lateral femoral condyle is towards the outside of the body and the medial femoral condyle is towards the inside

Femoral notch: the roof of the center of the knee, between the two femoral condyles

Femur: the thighbone

Fracture: a cracked bone

Gout: a disease that causes inflammation of the joints and excessive uric acid in the blood stream
"Greenstick" fracture: a fracture that occurs in the middle of children's bones since they can bend without breaking

Growth plates: softer, developing bone in growing children; they cannot be seen in X-rays

Hamstrings: muscles behind the thigh

Hyperextension: extension of a joint beyond its normal range

Hypertension: high blood pressure

Insidious: a disease develops so gradually that it is usually well established before it is diagnosed

Lateral: used to describe something that is located away from the center of the body

Ligament: tough tissue connecting bone to bone



Locking (of the knee): when a knee is frozen in a bent or extended position and unable to be fully extended or flexed

Loose bodies: cartilage fragments that detach and are loose in the knee

Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI): strong magnets and radio waves are used to create images of the soft tissues in the body; MRIs are clearer than X-rays

Medial: used to describe something that is located towards the center of the body

Meniscal repair: a procedure in which the torn part of the meniscus is repaired

Meniscus: cartilage between the femur and tibia that cushions the knee and distributes the weight from the femur onto the tibia; it helps with stability of the knee joint by converting the flat top of the tibia to a more stable, shallow socket

Microfracture technique: a technique in which bone surface is drilled in order to help blood and marrow get to the surface

NSAIDs: Non-Steroidal Anti-Inflammatory Drugs (for example, aspirin and ibuprofen)

Osteoarthritis: a disease in which the cartilage of joints breaks down over time

Osteochondritis Dissecans (OCD): when fragments of bone below a joint lose blood and separate from the rest of the bone

Partial Meniscectomy: a procedure in which the torn part of the meniscus is removed

Patella: the kneecap

Patella Tendon: a large tendon connecting the thigh (quads) muscle and patella to the tibia; it holds the patella in place

Periosteum: the membrane that lines the outside of all bones, except for the end of long joints

Proximal: used to describe something that is situated close to the center of the body

Recurvatum: hyperextension of the knee

Red zone (of the meniscus): the outer third of the meniscus; there is blood flow



RICE: Rest, Ice, Compression and Elevation

Scar tissue: connective tissue forming a scar, composed mostly of fibroblasts and unorganized collagen

Sprain: the stretching or tearing of a ligament

Subluxation: a partial dislocation

Synovitis: an inflammation of the lining of a joint

Tendon: tough tissue connecting muscles to bones

Quadriceps: the thigh muscle of the leg; it controls the movement of the patella

Patellofemoral Articulation: the name for the smooth surfaces between patella and trochlea groove

Tibia: the shinbone

Tibial tubercle: the bony prominence on the tibia below the patella; the patella tendon attaches to the tibial tubercle

Trochlea: the groove in which the patella glides up and down

Valgus alignment: when legs bow outward

Varus alignment: when legs bow inward

White zone (of the meniscus): the inner third of the meniscus; there is no blood flow and very little potential for healing

X-ray: electromagnetic radiation that bounces off bones to create a photograph of some part of a person's skeleton; commonly used to make diagnoses