

Post-op Knee Arthroscopy Care

Your child has had an operation called “Arthroscopy.” During surgery your child’s doctor used a small tube with a camera and another small tube with instruments to examine and treat the inside of the knee. Many common knee and elbow problems can be treated using arthroscopy, allowing much smaller skin incisions and openings into the joint space, and making recovery significantly faster.

After surgery the openings are closed using absorbable stitches under the skin. The surgeon reinforces this with steri-strips and a gauze dressing, then wraps the knee with an elastic bandage. Most patients will then have a hinged knee brace over all of the dressings. If your child was given an ice machine, the pad will be placed under the brace, but over the elastic wrap. It is important to keep some material between the pad and the skin.

After surgery, your child will spend at least an hour in the recovery room, and may then either go home, or spend a night as an inpatient. As the anesthesia wears off, your child will have medicine to help the pain, and will begin exercises to improve circulation and prevent blood clots. It is important to use crutches for stability and to prevent weight bearing if this is prescribed.

Your child will be sent home with pain medication. There are generally two types used in children, so if the one sent home with you is making his/her stomach upset, please call to speak to a nurse about changing the prescription. Give the prescription pain medicine as needed, and change to plain acetaminophen or ibuprofen as soon as possible. Being active and participating in physical therapy as instructed will help your child recuperate most quickly.

Your child should use ice packs or the ice machine around the clock for the first 3 days. Ice packs should be placed over the brace for 20 minutes, then taken off for 20 minutes. If using the ice machine, it may be left running continuously, disconnected only for walking or moving. Machines that squeeze the knee and give cold therapy should be set to **only** give cold therapy for the first week. Discuss with the doctor when it is advisable to begin using the pressure therapy. After the first three days, the ice machine or ice packs may be used as needed or desired. Do **not** apply heat.

Physical therapy is generally ordered to begin within 1 week of surgery. It is **VERY** important to begin exercises immediately to regain motion and strength in the knee and thigh, and to prevent complications. Call before surgery to get authorization for PT from your Primary Care Doctor, and schedule your first PT visit by 7 days after surgery.

The 5th day after surgery you may remove all bandages, and help your child take a shower. Do not remove the steri-strips (the tapes right on the skin). Most children need help to prevent accidental weight bearing, especially while in the bathroom. After showering, you need not replace gauze bandages, but most patients find a loosely wrapped elastic bandage under the brace to be most comfortable. The ends of the absorbable stitches come out from the steri-strip tapes. They look like clear fishing line. Those end pieces can be snipped off when the tapes (steri-strips) fall off, or they will eventually fall off by themselves.

Your child will need to return to see the surgeon several times after discharge to ensure adequate healing and progress with physical therapy. During these visits, you will be given instructions on your child's restricted and allowed activities. Depending on the surgery performed, activities will be resumed as healing progresses. Some surgeries require limitations on weight bearing even after pain is resolved. This can be difficult to enforce, but is absolutely necessary to allow blood flow to the cartilage and promote healing.

Complications following arthroscopy are rare, but if you have pain that is uncontrolled by the medicine, pus draining from incision, fever over 102.5, or redness at incisions or behind the knee/leg with increasing swelling after a few days, call our office right away. The office number is 510-428-3238.