Royal College of Anaesthetists

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Patient Information Forum

# Fitter Better Sooner

Endorsed by:

Centre for Perioperative Care

Royal College of Surgeons of England

# Preparing for a knee arthroscopy

## What is an arthroscopy?

A knee arthroscopy is a type of keyhole surgery. Your surgeon will put a narrow telescope through a small cut in your skin to look inside your knee joint and treat any problems. Some procedures require several small cuts to pass the instruments into the knee.

## What type of anaesthetic will I have?

There are two main types of anaesthetic given for this type of surgery:

- **general anaesthetic** – anaesthetic drugs which make you unconscious, so that you will feel nothing throughout your operation
- **spinal anaesthetic** – the lower half of your body is numbed by an injection in your lower back. This can be given on its own or with sedation (medicine to relax you).

Most knee arthroscopies are performed under a general anaesthetic.

Your anaesthetist will talk with you about the ways in which you can have your anaesthetic – based on your health, age and other medical conditions. Together you can choose the best method for you.

## How long will I be in hospital for?

You should be able to go home the same day.

## Before the operation

- Think about what you can do to improve your health before the operation. Stopping smoking, reducing how much alcohol you drink, eating more healthily and keeping active all help you recover more quickly after surgery.

- Even though exercise might be difficult for you, increasing activity and strengthening the muscles around your knee will help your recovery. Swimming, walking and cycling (stationary bikes can be good) can safely allow you to improve both your fitness and muscle strength. Listen to your body and stop if it's too much. There are some knee exercise videos at: bit.ly/3QC5EXz. General exercises to improve fitness for operations can be found at: bit.ly/3NaPqSf.

- If you have existing medical conditions (eg diabetes, high blood pressure, chest or heart disease) check with your GP well ahead of your surgery that your medication is up to date and as effective as it can be. This can help prevent delays to your surgery and give you the best chance of your operation and recovery going well.
- It's also important to have good dental hygiene and for your teeth and gums to be in good condition before the surgery, as this will reduce the risk of infection.
- You should arrange for an adult to take you home and be with you the first night at home after surgery if possible. If you have others you care for, you should arrange appropriate help for them too.

- It might help to plan some easy-to-prepare meals or frozen meals for when you come home after your operation. Think about including plenty of vitamin-rich fruit and vegetables in your diet to help your recovery. You can find information on healthy eating here: bit.ly/3tRScoE.

- You should take your normal medication to the hospital with you, in their original packaging. The staff will advise you on how to take it on the day of the operation. Check you have enough medication to last you for a few weeks when you return home.
- Remember to wear any hearing aids and take some spare batteries.
- It is normal to feel anxious about an operation. To help you relax before and after your surgery think about bringing some headphones and music with you, or something to read or do. Think about learning some breathing exercises or relaxation techniques.

- On the morning of surgery (or the evening before), you should have a bath or shower. You may be given an antiseptic to wash with to help reduce the risk of infection.
- Your stomach needs to be empty during surgery. The hospital will advise you in advance on when to stop drinking and eating on the day of the operation. It's important to drink plenty of water until you are told to stop to help you feel better after surgery and reduce complications.

- Make sure you have some painkillers, such as paracetamol, at home. The hospital will talk with you about how best to take these. Ice packs and resting with your leg up may help to reduce the swelling.
- Depending on the surgery needed, it may be difficult for you to climb stairs afterwards and you may require crutches to walk.
- You might not be able to drive for some time, so you may need to make arrangements with family and friends to help you get around when you come home.

## After the operation

- You may feel drowsy and tired initially while your body recovers.
- You may have some swelling and discomfort around your knee for several days. The surgeon will place some local anaesthetic into your knee at the end of the surgery to help with this. The hospital will advise you on painkillers to take as the effect of the local anaesthetic wears off.
- A physiotherapist or nurse will give you advice about exercises that you can do at home to help your recovery.

## Recovering at home

- You should try and keep any dressings as clean and dry as possible. If the dressings are not waterproof, you should cover them with a plastic bag when washing.
- If you have non-dissolvable stitches or staples, you will need to make an appointment with a nurse at your GP surgery to have them removed.
- You should take regular pain relief as advised by your hospital.
- You should do any exercises that you have been given to help stop your knee from becoming stiff or weak. You will gradually be able to be more active.
- To reduce the risk of deep vein thrombosis (blood clot), wear the support stockings until you are back to normal activity.
- Most people will need to take a week or two off work. The hospital will give you a fit (sick) note to cover you for this period – check you have this before you leave hospital. If you have a more active job, you may need longer to reduce the risk of damaging your knee.
- You can start driving again once you can do so comfortably and you can safely perform an emergency stop. How long this takes will vary from person to person and depends on the surgery you had. The surgeon will be able to advise you.

## Things to look out for at home

You should contact your GP or the hospital where you had your surgery if:

- you have severe pain or your pain increases
- your wound becomes red, swollen or feels hot to the touch
- you notice fluid or a discharge leaking from your wound
- you feel unwell with a fever over 38°C or vomiting
- you notice numbness or tingling around your knee
- you develop pain and swelling in your lower leg or chest pain and breathing difficulty.

These symptoms may occur if you have developed an infection and may need further treatment, usually with antibiotics.

**If you feel very unwell you should go to your nearest emergency department as soon as possible.**

# Additional resources available online

### Royal College of Anaesthetists

- Preparing for surgery: Fitter Better Sooner toolkit and animation (rcoa.ac.uk/fitterbettersooner).
- You and your anaesthetic and Your spinal anaesthetic (rcoa.ac.uk/patientinfo/leaflets-video-resources).
- Caring for someone who has had a general anaesthetic or sedation (rcoa.ac.uk/patientinfo/sedation).
- Risks associated with your anaesthetic (rcoa.ac.uk/patientinfo/risks).
- Patient information series (rcoa.ac.uk/patientinfo/leaflets-video-resources).

### Centre for Perioperative Care

- Information for patients (cpoc.org.uk/patients).

### Royal College of Surgeons of England

- Recovery tracker (bit.ly/2LDtPqa).
- Knee surgery – arthroscopic meniscectomy (bit.ly/2mJ27Kl).

### NHS Choices

- Arthroscopy (nhs.uk/conditions/arthroscopy).

## Disclaimer

We try very hard to keep the information in this leaflet accurate and up-to-date, but we cannot guarantee this. We don't expect this general information to cover all the questions you might have or to deal with everything that might be important to you. You should discuss your choices and any worries you have with your medical team, using this leaflet as a guide. This leaflet on its own should not be treated as advice. It cannot be used for any commercial or business purpose. For full details, please see our website: rcoa.ac.uk/patientinfo/resources#disclaimer

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# Tell us what you think

We welcome suggestions to improve this leaflet. If you're a patient or carer, we'd love to hear from you. Please complete this short survey at: rcoa.ac.uk/patientinfo/knee-arthroscopy#tell-us or you can scan the QR code below with your mobile.

If you have any general comments, please email them to: patientinformation@rcoa.ac.uk.

Your feedback helps us understand who is using our information, how useful it is and how our resources have helped you. Thank you.

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This leaflet will be reviewed within three years of the date of publication.

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