

# Arthroscopy

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## What is an arthroscopy?

An arthroscopy is a way of looking inside a joint through a small, lighted tube, called an arthroscope. The arthroscope can be used to look in many different joints. Arthroscopy is most often done in the knee, hip, shoulder, ankle or wrist joints.

## Why is an arthroscopy done?

Seeing inside the joint can help the surgeon decide what is wrong with the joint. Some common problems that can be seen this way are:

- torn ligaments
- meniscus or cartilage injuries
- arthritic changes in the joint and under the knee cap
- small bone chips

Some of these can be fixed through the arthroscope. If this is not possible, you may need further surgery.

## How is an arthroscopy done?

In the Operating Room you may have either a:

- general anesthetic, you are asleep during surgery,
  - spinal anesthetic, you are awake, but will not feel pain from the waist down during the surgery,
  - local anesthetic, you are awake but the knee is frozen during surgery.
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The surgeon makes 2 or more small cuts (incisions) around your joint. One incision is used for the arthroscope. The other incision(s) are used for the instruments to repair any damage in the joint.

The length of time needed for the surgery depends on what the doctor needs to do to your joint.

## Infection

Your surgery may be cancelled if you have an infection. Please call your surgeon if you have:

- any cuts, scratches, insect bites, or infections on the leg that you will have the surgery. **Do not shave your legs.**
- a fever of 38°C or 100°F or higher
- a tooth infection, boil or abscess
- a current antibiotic prescription

## How will I feel after an arthroscopy?

The amount of pain you will have after surgery depends on the amount of surgery done. The pain should be controlled by the medication your doctor orders. It is normal to have:

- some pain
- stiffness
- swelling

During your surgery medication may have been put in your joint for pain control. This may last for 12 to 24 hours and you may not feel much pain. When the freezing wears off you will have pain.

It is very important to take your pain medication before the freezing wears off. Do not wait to take it when the pain is severe. Pick up your pain medication at your pharmacy before you get home.

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## How can I relieve pain and swelling?

Take the pain medication as instructed by your surgeon and nurse.

When resting keep your leg up on pillows. Keep it higher than your waist.

### Ice

- Apply an ice pack for up to 20 minutes at a time.
- Wrap the ice pack in a plastic bag and a towel before you put it on the joint. This will keep your incision dry and prevent frost bite.
- The ice pack may be reapplied several times a day (or as instructed) to decrease pain and swelling.

## What activity can I do after the surgery?

How much activity and weight bearing you can have on your knee is based on what the surgeon recommends. You will be given instructions after surgery. Your surgeon will advise you if you need physiotherapy.

Let pain be your guide. If it hurts slow down or stop the activity.

Wear closed toed, non-slip footwear.

## How do I care for my dressing and incisions?

Before you go home, your doctor or nurse will tell you how to care for your dressing and incisions.

## When is my follow-up visit?

You will see the surgeon about 1 to 2 weeks after surgery.

## Call your surgeon if:

- you have a fever 38°C or 100°F or higher (unless you have been told otherwise by your surgeon)
- your pain is getting worse after the second day after surgery

## Call your surgeon or go to emergency if:

- your incision becomes red, hot or swollen
- you have pain or swelling in your calf
- you have shortness of breath or chest pain



**Be safe!**  
**Wear closed toed, non-slip footwear while recovering from surgery.**

**No flip flops!**