

Partial Knee Replacement Unicompartmental Knee Replacement

What is wrong with my knee?

Osteoarthritis, the most common type of arthritis, is the “wear and tear” arthritis of the knee. Normal joint surfaces are covered with a slippery white layer called cartilage. When this cartilage wears away, it is called arthritis. There are 3 “compartments” of the knee joint: the medial compartment (inside of knee between the thigh bone and shin bone), the lateral compartment (outside of knee between thigh bone and shin bone), and the patello-femoral compartment (between the knee cap and thigh bone). Most patients will have arthritis that involves the entire knee or all 3 compartments. Unicompartment knee arthritis refers to arthritis that is isolated to only 1 compartment.

What causes knee arthritis?

Arthritis is the “wear and tear” or degradation of the cartilage in the knee joint. There are several risk factors for developing arthritis including obesity, genetics, aging, previous knee injuries, and an infection of the knee joint. When the arthritis occurs in only one compartment, it is called unicompartmental knee arthritis.

How is knee arthritis diagnosed?

Individuals with unicompartmental knee arthritis usually have pain with activities isolated to the arthritic compartment. Other symptoms include stiffness and swelling. The patient is commonly “bow-legged” or “knocked-knee” depending on the location of their knee arthritis. Weight bearing x-rays usually confirm the diagnosis of unicompartmental knee arthritis.



Medial compartment arthritis

How is knee arthritis treated?

Treatment for knee arthritis generally starts with non-steroidal anti-inflammatories (nsaids), such as Ibuprofen or Aleve; activity modification such as biking or swimming; and weight loss. Other options include injections. There are two types of injections. Cortisone is a steroid anti-inflammatory that can be injected into the knee joint. Cortisone helps relieve pain and swelling. Synvisc or Hylagen is another type of injection. These two injections are very gelatinous and help cushion the knee. Synvisc or Hylagen will not give you new cartilage or cure your arthritis. Sometimes a brace that “off-loads” the arthritic knee compartment is used by patients. When these treatments fail, the patient may elect to have surgery.

What happens if I need surgery?

When non-operative treatment fails, the patient may decide to have surgery. Not everybody is a candidate for a unicompartmental or partial knee replacement. The knee arthritis must be isolated to one compartment, either the medial or lateral compartment. If the arthritis involves the entire knee, a partial knee replacement is not recommended and should not be done. A partial knee replacement removes the damaged cartilage and bone from the affected compartment and replaces it with metal and plastic components. Most patients stay 1-2 nights in the hospital.

