



ARTHROSCOPY

PATIENT INFORMATION

An arthroscopy is a type of keyhole surgery used both to diagnose and treat problems with joints.

It's most commonly used on the knees, ankles, shoulders, elbows, wrists and hips.

An arthroscopy involves the use of a device called an arthroscope to examine the joints. This is a thin, metal tube about the length and width of a drinking straw that contains a light source and a camera. Images are sent from the arthroscope to a video screen or an eyepiece, so the surgeon is able to see inside the joint.

It's also possible for tiny surgical instruments to be used alongside an arthroscope to allow the surgeon to treat certain joint conditions.

As the equipment used during an arthroscopy is so small, only minor cuts need to be made in the skin. This means the procedure has some potential advantages over traditional, "open" surgery, including:

- less pain after the operation
- faster healing time
- lower risk of infection
- you can often go home the same day
- you may be able to return to normal activities more quickly

Why it's used

An arthroscopy might be recommended if you have problems such as persistent [joint pain](#), swelling or stiffness, and scans have not been able to identify the cause. The purpose of the procedure is to help diagnose and treat the problem.

Alternatively, you may have had Xrays or an MRI scan which suggests that there is a problem within your joint or around your joint, that could be significantly improved or cured by performing an arthroscopy.

An arthroscopy can be used to treat a range of joint problems and conditions. For example, it can be used to:

- repair [damaged cartilage](#)
- remove fragments of loose bone or cartilage
- drain away any excess fluid
- treat conditions such as frozen shoulder, scar tissue, cartilage defects, impingement.

What happens during an arthroscopy?

The arthroscope is inserted through a small cut in the skin made next to the joint. Further small incisions may also be made to allow an examining probe or surgical instruments to be inserted.

Your surgeon will then examine the inside of the joint using the arthroscope and, if necessary, remove or repair any problem areas.

This will usually be done under [general anaesthetic](#), although sometimes a spinal or [local anaesthetic](#) is used.

The procedure is usually performed as a day case, which means you'll normally be able to go home on the same day as the surgery.

Recovering from an arthroscopy

The time it takes to recover from an arthroscopy can vary, depending on the joint involved and the specific procedure you had.

Sometimes you will need to be in a brace, use crutches or a sling for a few weeks after surgery depending on what is found and done at the time of surgery.

It's often possible to return to work and light, physical activities within a few weeks, but more demanding physical activities such as lifting and sport may not be possible for several months.

Your surgeon or care team will advise you how long it's likely to take to fully recover and what activities you should avoid until you're feeling better.

While you're recovering, you should contact your surgical team or GP for advice if you think you may have developed one of the complications mentioned below.

What are the risks?

An arthroscopy is generally considered to be a safe procedure, but like all types of surgery it does carry some risks.

It's normal to experience short-lived problems such as swelling, bruising, stiffness and discomfort after an arthroscopy. These will usually improve during the days or weeks following the procedure.

More serious problems are much less common, occurring in less than 1 in 100 cases. They include:

- **a blood clot that develops in one of the limbs** – this is known as [deep vein thrombosis \(DVT\)](#) and it can cause pain and swelling in the affected limb, these clots can travel round your body and in rare cases lead to death.
- **infection inside the joint** – this is known as [septic arthritis](#) and it can cause a high temperature (fever), pain and swelling in the joint
- **bleeding inside the joint** – which often causes severe pain and swelling

- **accidental damage to the nerves that are near the joint** – this can lead to numbness and some loss of sensation, which may be temporary or permanent
- **failure** – Sometimes the arthroscopy may not improve your symptoms and things may recur similar to or even worse than before, although this is uncommon.
- **Stiffness** – This can occur after any operation but normally resolves without the need for any intervention
- As with any operation, there is a very small risk of complications related to the general anaesthetic including death.

After arthroscopic surgery, see a doctor urgently if you:

- Have severe and progressively worsening pain or swelling in the knee, particularly if the joint is also hot, tender or red. (This may indicate bleeding or infection in the joint).
- Develop a high temperature.
- See fluid, pus or excessive blood coming from the site of the incision

Speak to your surgeon about the possible risks before agreeing to have an arthroscopy.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION PLEASE CONTACT YOUR SURGEON

- Please ring 0203 – 6332288 or email admin@theolympiaclinic.com

ALTERNATIVELY THE BELOW ARE USEFUL LINKS TO FIND OUT MORE

<http://www.nhs.uk/conditions/Pages/hub.aspx>

<http://www.mayoclinic.org/tests-procedures/acl-reconstruction/basics/definition/prc-20012625>

<http://orthoinfo.aaos.org/topic.cfm?topic=A00549>