

Meniscal Cysts

Meniscal cysts are fluid filled sacks that come from the menisci (cartilages) in your knee.

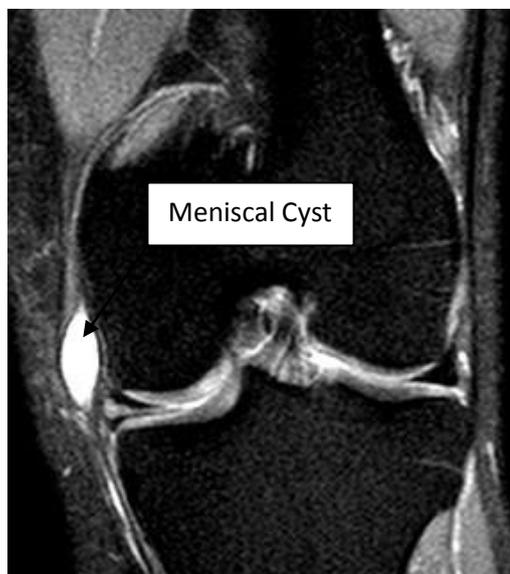
Menisci are horse-shoe shaped rubbery shock absorbers within the knee. There is one on the inside and one on the outside of the knee.

How do cysts happen?

As you get older the inside of the meniscus degenerates and instead of being rubbery it develops a fluid centre. A tear occurs in the meniscus from the knee joint to the fluid centre of the meniscus. The tear acts as a one way valve, allowing some of the natural oil within the knee joint to pass into the fluid centre of the meniscus, but not out. The fluid centre of the meniscus gets bigger and swells. Very occasionally the one way valve tear in the meniscus allows the fluid back into the knee joint and the cyst goes away.

Problems

On the inside of the knee there is a very broad ligament (the medial collateral ligament). Meniscal cysts rarely get around this ligament. They lie under the ligament as a vague swelling. This swelling often gets bigger with exercise and causes pain. All under the medial collateral ligament is tender as pressing on it squashes the meniscal cyst.



On the outside of the knee the ligament (lateral collateral ligament) is a lot thinner and round. When meniscal cysts swell due to fluid being pushed into them from the knee joint, they appear as discreet swellings along the knee joint. These may be tender.

Treatment

Meniscal cysts vary in size. They can disappear for long periods of time. They are always likely to come back due to the tear in the meniscus. They are best removed by removing the torn part of the meniscus (cartilage) and hence the one way valve. This is done at an operation called an **arthroscopy**, where a camera / telescope is put in your knee and special instruments used to remove the tear.