

Quadriceps Tendon Rupture

The quadriceps tendon is the large tendon above the knee that joins the quadriceps muscle (large muscle at the front of the thigh) to the patella (knee cap). This tendon allows the power from contraction of the quadriceps muscle to be transferred to the patella and so straighten the knee.

Rupture of the quadriceps tendon usually occurs in the elderly. Men are affected more often than women. There is usually no warning that the tendon is going to rupture.

The tendon ruptures when the muscle pulls very hard, at a time when the knee is unable to straighten. This is usually when jumping, falling onto a flexed knee or just stumbling.

The knee becomes very painful and you are unable to straighten the knee without using your hands. It requires immediate attendance at Accident & Emergency. Here your knee will be examined and an X-ray taken. The X-ray may not show any problem. If the rupture is not obvious clinically then an ultrasound or MRI examination will be required to confirm the problem.



Treatment is with surgery to repair the tendon. This may just be by sewing the ends of the tendon together or by using anchors (small screws with sutures attached). The anchors are placed in the patella to strengthen the repair.

After the tendon has been repaired the knee needs resting for 6 weeks in a splint that holds the knee straight. This is followed by physiotherapy to regain the movement and strength within the knee.

Rarely does the knee return to “normal” after this kind of injury. Often the knee has a little less movement and power than before.