

Plain Language Summary

The Diagnosis and Treatment of Osteochondritis Dissecans of the Knee



Photo courtesy of Kevin G. Shea, MD, FAAOS

Background

Osteochondritis dissecans (OCD) is a condition where part of the bone and the cartilage on top of it in the knee don't get enough blood. This can cause the bone and cartilage to get weak. It mostly happens in kids and teens who play sports and may be caused by using the knee too much.

Risk Factors

OCD can happen for different reasons. It may run in families or happen from using the joint too much. It can also happen in other joints like the elbow or ankle, but it is most common in the knee. OCD goes through stages. At first, only a small part of the bone under the cartilage gets hurt. Later, the

bone and cartilage can come loose and move around inside the knee.

Diagnosis

A doctor will look at your knee and ask questions about your symptoms. Common signs of OCD include pain, swelling, and the knee getting stuck, popping, or catching.

To check for OCD, the doctor might order an X-ray. But X-rays don't always show the problem clearly. If OCD shows up on the X-ray, an MRI is often used next. An MRI gives a better picture and helps the doctor see how bad the OCD is and if the piece of bone is loose.

Treatment Options

Treatment depends on how much growing the child or teen has left to do and if the bone and cartilage piece might move.

- **Non-surgical treatment:** In many cases, OCD in kids and young teens heals on its own. Rest and avoiding sports usually helps with pain and swelling. The doctor might suggest crutches or a cast, but there is no strong proof that these help the healing.
- **Surgical treatment:** If the OCD is unstable or not healing, surgery might be needed. Surgery may also be done if the patient is done growing and the loose piece is causing problems. There isn't strong proof for the best type of surgery, but doctors usually try to fix the bone and help it heal by drilling into it to increase blood flow.

What to expect after surgery

Most experts agree that physical therapy after surgery can help, even though there isn't strong proof. If the knee still hurts after surgery, doctors may check on it with X-rays or an MRI to see if it's healing.

This summary was written by the Committee on Healthcare Safety.

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