

Geoffrey H. Westrich, M.D.
Hospital for Special Surgery
535 East 70th Street Rm. 324
New York, N.Y. 10021

Patient and Family Education

ARTHROSCOPY

What is arthroscopy?

Arthroscopy is an exam of a joint (knee, wrist, elbow, shoulder, hip, ankle), using a tube (an arthroscope) to view inside the joint. It can tell the doctor about the condition of your joint and identify tears, loose bodies, and the condition of tissues. Also, arthroscopy can be used to sample tissue, remove loose bodies, and repair or reconstruct tears.

How long does arthroscopy take?

Arthroscopy usually takes from 30 minutes to several hours. The amount of time it takes depends on how many repairs need to be done.

What do I do before surgery?

- You will receive instructions from your doctor about eating or drinking. Usually, you cannot have anything to eat or drink after 12 midnight on the night before your surgery.
- **Stop taking pain relieving anti-inflammatory medications such as Aspirin, Motrin®, Advil®, Naprosyn®, and similar medications, 7 days before your surgery.** Ask your doctor what type of medicine you can take in place of these.
- Take your other usual medications, unless your doctor tells you to do differently.

What happens when I come in for the procedure?

- A tube (IV) will be placed in a vein in your arm. Fluid and medication will be given through this directly into your vein.
- The staff will shave the joint before the operation.
- You will get anesthesia to numb the area. Anesthesia may be local (just at the joint), regional (numbs the limb or extremity) or general (this puts you to sleep). If you receive regional or local anesthesia, additional medication will be given to help you relax.
- The arthroscope may be inserted in more than one place, so you may have more than one incision (break in the skin).

What happens after the surgery?

- The nurses will frequently check your blood pressure and pulse, and inspect the surgical area.
- The joint will be raised on a pillow to control swelling.
- The joint may have a tight bandage and ice may be applied.
- If you had knee surgery, you will have a knee support or an elastic wrap.

How will I take care of myself at home?

- Keep the bandage clean and dry.
- A small amount of drainage, about the size of a quarter, is normal. If drainage increases, or if bleeding occurs, report this to your surgeon right away.
- Do not remove the dressing until 3 days after the surgery. After 3 days remove the dressing and place a band-aid over each site. Change the band-aids every day until the stitches are taken out.
- If you can stand for 10-15 minutes, you can usually shower. **But you must keep the dressing dry by covering it with a plastic bag.**
- You may be instructed to use a sling for shoulder or elbow surgery. Your doctor will tell you on how long to wear the sling.

What about pain management?

- Your doctor will order medication for pain relief. Take the medication exactly as prescribed for you. Call your doctor if the pain is not controlled.
- Apply ice packs wrapped in a towel to relieve your pain and reduce swelling. Ice may be applied for 20 minutes then removed for 20 minutes. Repeat as directed. Hint: Try using a bag of frozen peas or frozen corn as an ice pack. It is neat and convenient.

What signs should I report to my doctor?

Report any of these symptoms to your surgeon right away:

- Fever of 100.5 or higher that continues after 48 hours.
- Any bleeding or drainage that continues after 48 hours.
- Feeling of numbness or tingling sensation, and change in the temperature or color of your leg, foot, or toes that does not go away.
- Swollen, red, and painful limb.
- Increased unrelieved pain.
- Dressing becomes wet.
- Persistent headache, blurry vision, double vision, dizziness.
- Nausea and vomiting.
- If you have spinal or epidural anesthesia and the injection site is inflamed (red, swollen, or oozes blood or fluid).

SPECIAL INSTRUCTIONS

- Keep the limb raised on firm pillows. Put the pillows under the calf if you have knee or ankle surgery. Put the pillow under your elbow or wrist if you have shoulder surgery.
- If you have knee or ankle surgery, you can walk with crutches as your doctor orders. A physical therapist will instruct you in how to use the crutches and what exercises you will need to do.
- You will need to make an appointment to see your doctor 10-14 days after surgery. At that time the stitches will be removed. Your doctor may recommend physical therapy to help restore strength and movement in your limb.

This resource provides brief, general information about this health care topic. It does not take the place of specific instructions you receive from your health care providers. For answers to other questions consult your physician or other health care provider