

Common Causes of Knee Pain

Knee pain is extremely common in athletes. In order to treat the cause of the pain, it is important to have an evaluation and proper diagnosis. Common reasons for knee pain in athletes include the following:

Knee Ligament Injuries

Ligament injuries to the knee are very common in sports that require stopping and starting or quickly changing directions. These extreme forces on the knee can result in torn ligaments. The anterior cruciate ligament (ACL) and the medial collateral ligament (MCL) are the most often injured, but the posterior cruciate ligament (PCL) and the lateral collateral ligament (LCL) can also be injured.

Cruciate ligament injuries don't always cause pain, but typically cause a loud "pop." Most of these injuries are confirmed with an MRI. [Arthroscopic surgery](#) is sometimes the best way to find a partial tear.

Torn Knee Cartilage ([Meniscus Injuries](#))

Torn knee cartilage is usually a torn meniscus([image](#)). These small, "c" shaped pieces of cartilage act as cushions between the thigh bone (femur) and the tibia (shin bone). There is one on the outside (lateral meniscus) and one on the inside of the knee (medial meniscus). Meniscus tears are often the result of twisting, pivoting, decelerating, or a sudden impact. It can be identified by various [manual tests a physician can perform](#) to detect torn cartilage.

[Chondromalacia](#)

This term refers to softening and deterioration of the underside of the kneecap. In young athletes this is typically an injury from trauma, overuse, poor alignment of the knee joint, or muscle imbalance. This leads to friction and rubbing under the kneecap the results damage to the surface of the cartilage. The sensation is a dull pain around or under the kneecap that worsens when walking down stairs or hills, climbing stair other weight bearing activity.

[Osteoarthritis](#) of the Knee

Osteoarthritis is the most common type of arthritis in athletes. It is a degenerative disease that results in a gradual wearing away of joint cartilage. Typical symptoms of osteoarthritis are pain, swelling, and a decrease in the range of motion of the knee. Morning stiffness that decreases with motion is also common.

[Tendonitis and Ruptured Tendons](#)

Tendonitis is an inflammation or irritation of a tendon often caused by overuse. In the knee, this is sometimes called "jumper's knee." Tendonitis is often identified due to tenderness at the point where the patellar tendon meets the bone, just below the kneecap. Impacts and sudden movements (such as trying to break a fall) can force the quadriceps muscles to contract forcefully and cause the quadriceps tendon to be strained or possible tear (rupture).

Iliotibial Band Syndrome

This is an overuse injury that causes an ache or burning sensation at the side of the knee during activity.