Orthopaedic Connection

Cartilage

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Transforming patient information into patient understanding.

To most patients the word cartilage means the structure that is in our knee that becomes torn with certain injuries. This will never change, but it would have been a lot easier for Orthopaedic Surgeons if the little structure in your knee had never been misnamed “the cartilage”.

Why?
Because it’s real name is meniscus. Many patients have never heard of the meniscus and they have no clue of what you are talking about.

So what is the problem?
Well, here goes. The substance or structure in all of our joints that covers the ends of the bones is the true cartilage.

So –

Mensicus = gristle like, shock absorber structure in the knee that often becomes torn.

Cartilage = the stuff in our joints covering the ends of the bones that this article is about.

Cartilage is the tough, smooth, flexible substance that covers the ends of the bones everywhere in the body where there is a joint. If healthy, this substance is very smooth and shiny. To further describe its composition would get very complicated, but it is about 75% water.

Its shape can change and it compresses under pressure and then resumes its natural shape when pressure is released. Its smoothness has been compared to wet ice.

Cartilage covering the ends of the bones can be described as a shock absorber. It provides a smooth surface for the joints to move. Under normal conditions there is almost no friction in joints as the surfaces glide over each other.

The cartilage varies in thickness depending on the joint being the thickest in the knee. It is a great protector substance that most of us take completely for granted (like most things in our body!).

If cartilage never changed Orthopaedic Surgeons would have a lot less to do!

Unfortunately it is susceptible to deterioration as we age and it begins to breakdown. The reason for this is not completely known. Injury to the joint surface can accelerate deterioration over time.

It leads to osteoarthritis in which the bones change shape somewhat and form spurs. The tendons and ligament also deteriorate causing stiffness and inflammation in and around the joints.

The mechanisms for cartilage deterioration are not well understood, but are the subject of research in an effort to prevent or reverse the effects of this breakdown of the joint cartilage.

My patients put their trust in me and what I do improves the quality of their lives.

Gratiot County Herald Archive and Office Website

I hope what you have read has raised questions. No problem!

Please log onto www.orthopodsurgeon.com. It has a huge amount of musculoskeletal information in the Website and the Archive of all previous GCH articles.

Check it out and be amazed what you can learn.

Good health. Good life. All the best to you. Be well.
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