

Argus Orthopaedic Zone

Chondromalacia - The Next Chapter

By Thomas J. Haverbush, M.D.
Orthopaedic Surgeon

Transforming patient information into patient understanding.

Chondromalacia means literally, softening of the articular cartilage, most frequently in the knee. Hyaline or articular cartilage is that very specialized tissue that covers the bone surface inside the movable joints.

It is very smooth and is lubricated by joint fluid. In a healthy joint the amount of friction is about equal to wet ice! Anyone who has slipped on wet ice (probably everybody) knows what I am talking about.

I need to point out again that chondromalacia can affect any movable joint in the body that contains hyaline (articular) cartilage.

Knee Chondromalacia

If the changes in the joint surface cause a grinding sensation it is referred to as crepitation. It affects any part of the knee joint not just the kneecap. Eventually if the chondromalacia becomes more severe, it can become painful and even disabling. In the early stages though it might not be painful. You know there is something wrong by the grinding you feel especially going up and down stairs. Difficulty getting up from a seated position can be painful. Pain also occurs when the joint is jarred or bumped.

Pre Arthritis

It would be entirely correct to think about the various stages of chondromalacia as a pre arthritis condition, which can lead eventually to increased pain and stiffness in the joint. Chondromalacia, while a benign condition can be disabling.

Chondromalacia Treatment

Again, remember that chondromalacia affects other joints in addition to the knee.

- Non steroidal anti-inflammatory medication such as Advil for its anti-inflammatory effect. For mild cases, obviously.
- A knee sleeve or brace can be prescribed by a professional person.
- Special exercises to strengthen the leg can be helpful.

- Injecting the joint with a steroidal medication such as Celestone, which I use in the office.
- Taking a Glucosamine and Chondroitin supplement like Osteo-Bi-Flex, triple strength, two per day.
- In more severe cases injecting a pain relieving lubrication liquid such as Supartz, which I use in the office.
- Weight loss can relieve stress on the joints and is always helpful.
- Arthroscopic surgery is an option if other measures have not given relief.

Conclusion

Chondromalacia comes in many "shapes and sizes". It can be really confusing to those who don't understand it well. Treatment, I have found can only be effective if the stage of chondromalacia is correctly identified.

Notice

In the near future all the Argus Orthopaedic Zone articles that have been published will be available on the website www.orthopodsurgeon.com. They will all be listed by title so you will be able to go back and find articles you may want to retrieve or even print. I am very excited about being able to do this because there will be so much information in the archive and it never will be lost.

Just another way www.orthopodsurgeon.com and Your Orthopaedic Connection can continue to keep you informed.

Our goal is simple - To help people return to more pain free, functional lives.

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

Be well.

Dr. Haverbush