

# CHONDROMALACIA OF THE PATELLA

Chondromalacia is a condition that affects your kneecap, or patella. A patella that is affected with chondromalacia has varying degrees of pitting, irregularity, fissuring, softening, roughness, increased wear and, in advanced cases, can sometimes be worn down to the bone. Another way of thinking about this disorder is having arthritis on the back of the kneecap and, in fact, if looked at under the microscope, it is approximately the same thing. A knee with this problem hurts, swells and grinds. However, a lot of patients have chondromalacia of the patella and have no symptoms other than a grinding sensation when they squat or climb stairs. This grinding sensation is often non-painful.

There are many different causes of chondromalacia of the patella, some of which are known and some of which are unknown. One easily understood cause would be an injury such as hitting the dashboard in a car accident or in a fall. Another cause is a patella that does not track, or glide, normally and because of that, the cartilage wears abnormally and prematurely. Others have no known injury and no known obvious visible abnormalities either on examination or x-ray. We just do not know the exact cause in every case of chondromalacia of the patella.

Treatment options will obviously vary, depending on the cause, severity, patient's desires, etc. The vast majority can be treated with conservative or non-surgical methods.

The first and probably the most effective treatment is to modify your activities and try to eliminate or decrease exposure to known aggravating activities. There are, unfortunately, many aggravating activities and these include repetitive stair climbing, squatting, running, cycling (especially a stationary bicycle), weight lifting with free weights and even wearing high heels. Any activity which is done to stress a bent or flexed knee can be aggravating.

You will need to do exercises designed to strengthen the quadriceps muscle and stretch out the hamstring. Most patients with chondromalacia have a relative weakness of the quadriceps and tightness of the hamstrings. A physiotherapist will show you how to do these simple exercises.

The next treatment is the use of an anti-inflammatory drug. I recommend taking this for about two weeks and then ceasing the medication. If the symptoms return, take it again for another two weeks and then use it when you need it for ten days or two weeks at a time. All have side effects, the most common being irritation of the gastrointestinal tract, in particular the stomach.

For those that fail to respond satisfactorily to the above, surgery is a consideration. The most frequently recommended surgery would be an arthroscopic examination to look at the back of the patella and smooth it if possible.

It is very important that you understand that chondromalacia of the patella cannot be totally cured. Most can be improved with appropriate conservative and/or surgical treatment.



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