

# Mending meniscals in children, improving diagnosis and recovery

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The meniscus is a rubber-like, crescent moon-shaped cartilage cushion that sits between the leg and thigh bone. Each knee has two menisci: one on the inside of the knee joint and one on the outside. In recent years, more children have been diagnosed with tears to this area (meniscal tears); however, according to a literature review published in the November 2009 issue of the *Journal of the American Academy of Orthopaedic Surgeons* (JAAOS), prospects for a full recovery are high.

"Seventy-five to 90 percent of children who have meniscal tears heal successfully when they are treated appropriately. In adults, the success rate is often less than 50 percent," said study co-author Dennis Kramer, M.D., an attending orthopaedic surgeon at Children's Hospital Boston and instructor in Orthopaedic Surgery at Harvard Medical School. "A child's physiology is different than an adult's—they are growing and therefore have a greater [blood flow](#) to the meniscus. This helps in the healing process."

## How Meniscal Tears Occur

Meniscal tears often occur when a child twists his or her knee while playing sports (the area becomes painful and swollen and tears are sometimes dismissed as knee sprains). Children can continue to experience pain, but often do not seek help because they do not want to miss out on sporting events or have to go to the doctor.

Additionally, a small percentage of children are born with abnormally shaped "discoid" menisci that are larger and therefore more prone to tearing. If your child complains of a "snapping" or "popping" knee, it may be due to a discoid meniscus.

According to the study, several factors are contributing to the increase in diagnosis of meniscal tears in children:

- more children are participating in sports, where knee injuries often occur;
- more healthcare professionals are aware of and recognize the signs of meniscal tears; and
- the use of [magnetic resonance imaging](#) (MRI) helps physicians to better diagnose them.

### **Early Treatment Important for Long-Term Health**

Dr. Kramer stresses that although meniscal tears in [children](#) can often be repaired successfully, they should be treated quickly.

"Tears that are repaired within three months seem to heal better than those treated at a later time," he said. "Additionally, if a child has a meniscal tear that cannot be repaired but instead has to be removed, studies indicate that it can lead to arthritis later in life."

Source: American Academy of Orthopaedic Surgeons ([news](#) : [web](#))

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