



PARTNER UPDATE

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WORK PARTNERS OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH SPECIALISTS

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Common Knee Injuries in the Workplace

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Knee injuries are common in the workplace. There are several ligaments, muscles, and tendons surrounding the knee that can be injured. The knee is a hinge joint meaning it should flex and extend like a door. It is not meant to twist or bend side to side. The knee is often injured when these twisting or side to side bending motions occur.

Knee sprains are common and involve the ligaments and tendons surrounding the knee. When we experience a knee sprain we often over protect the leg which causes muscle atrophy. Muscle atrophy can cause other issues to nearby joints. Because we are not using our leg as much due to injury, we often lose some of our knee range of motion which can impair our normal gait pattern. We also tend to walk with a limp when we have knee pain. This can cause low back pain or pain on the unaffected leg which is compensating for the injured leg.

Recovery from a knee sprain varies depending on the severity of the sprain. Generally tissue healing occurs over a span of 4-8 weeks. Maintaining full knee range of motion, strength, and functionality is very important during the recovery process of a knee sprain.

Injuries to the meniscus are also very common in the workplace. Injuries to the meniscus often occur due to twisting motions while the leg is planted. The meniscus is a cushion between the thigh bone (femur) and the shin bone (tibia). It transfers weight from the upper leg to the lower leg and stabilizes the knee during bending and straightening. There are many different types of tears to the meniscus depending on their shape, location, and size. If the tear is located in an area of good blood supply, the tear may heal on its own. If the tear is in a location of poor blood supply, meniscectomies are often performed. Meniscectomies are small arthroscopic surgeries where the meniscus tear is trimmed away.

The recovery time after a meniscectomy ranges from 2-3 months before the patient can return to their previous level of function. Patients who are very active and perform cutting or pivoting movements return to these activities closer to 3 months. Rehab is focused on gaining their full knee range of motion, strengthening the muscles around the knee and muscles that support the knee, and performing functional activities with proper mechanics.

Other injuries that can occur to the knee are ACL (anterior cruciate ligament) and PCL (posterior cruciate ligament) tears. These two ligaments provide the main stability for the knee. They are located deep within the knee and attach from the femur to the tibia. They prevent shifting of the tibia and femur on one another. ACL injuries often require repair, however, depending on the patient's normal activity level and their ability to cope with the injury, it is not always necessary. Recovery from an ACL repair can take up to 6 months to return to high level activities. PCL injuries are not often repaired if only the PCL is involved. If PCL repair is performed the recovery time is similar to that of the ACL.

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The best way to avoid knee injuries in the workplace and in the community is to avoid planting and twisting movements of the leg. It is best to turn your entire body rather than to twist as it stresses the ligaments and tendons of the knee. Wearing appropriate footwear is also important in avoiding injury to the knee. The mechanics of the foot greatly affect the knee and its ability to maintain as an upright hinge joint. Shoes with good arch support are helpful in maintaining good foot mechanics. Lastly, maintaining good strength in the quads and hamstrings but also in your hips is very important. If the hip is not strong, the knee will fall inward causing a medial torque on the knee, which makes one more susceptible to knee injuries.

In the event of a knee injury it is important to ice the knee several times a day for the first week or two. This helps with inflammation, which makes it easier for the clinician and physical therapist to determine the proper diagnosis and treatment. Maintaining your knee range of motion by bending and straightening it as far as tolerable is also important. It is easier to maintain your range of motion than try to gain it back after you have lost it.

About the Author

WorkPartners is very proud to announce that our Director of Therapy, Leanne Lundgren, DPT, has achieved the distinction of becoming an Orthopedic Certified Specialist recognized by the American Board of Physical Therapy Specialties. Fewer than 10% of physical therapists gain Board certification, which demonstrates advanced knowledge, skills, and abilities in their chosen specialty. This distinction elevates the physical therapy department at WorkPartners to the highest levels of care in the specialty of orthopedics. Congratulations to Dr. Lundgren for her achievement!

WorkPartners Occupational Health Specialists

Located in North San Diego County, WorkPartners clinics are full service Occupational Health clinics dedicated to supporting the health and wellness of local employees. Learn more at www.WorkPartnersOHS.com.