

Arthroscopy

What is arthroscopy?

Arthroscopy is a keyhole procedure used to see inside a joint, and diagnose and treat any problems. This can include the knee, shoulder, elbow, wrist and ankle.

Who can benefit from having arthroscopy?

Sometimes arthroscopy is needed when non-surgical methods cannot define or treat problems within the joint. This may include when there is a tear in the cartilage or ligament(s), to find out the reason for any inflammation and/or pain (often associated with arthritis), and removal of a loose piece of bone in the joint, among others.

Procedure

Arthroscopy is performed under local, general or spinal anesthetic – this will vary depending on the joint and extent of surgery needed. Between one and a few small incisions are made, and the arthroscope – a thin tube with a camera attached - is inserted into one of the incisions. This enables the surgeon to see the procedure on a TV monitor. If corrective surgery is needed, special instruments will be inserted through the incisions allowing the surgeon to perform any repairs as necessary. Following surgery, the incisions are then closed, usually with dissolvable stitches, and the wound bandaged.

Recovery

Recovery from arthroscopy will depend on the joint, lifestyle and nature of the patient's job. For example, knee arthroscopy may mean that the patient may not be able to play sport for a long time, and arthroscopy performed on the hand will mean the patient needing to avoid any heavy lifting for an extended period of time. Some patients may also need to undergo a course of physiotherapy. Your surgeon will discuss recovery with you on an individual basis following arthroscopy.

Risks

Complications associated with arthroscopy include breathing problems as a reaction to the anesthetic, bleeding, infection of the wound, and damage to nerves/blood vessels, blood clotting, joint stiffness and persistent pain.