

PATELLAR DISLOCATION

Patellar dislocations occur when the knee cap slips out of the femoral groove (thighbone) and gets stuck outside the joint. This can occur either with a contact or noncontact injury. Most commonly, an athlete will dislocate the knee when they make a sudden change in direction or twist with the foot in a planted position. Direct blows to the kneecap can also dislocate the patella. Some individuals have ligament laxity and are prone to repeat or recurrent partial patella dislocations or subluxations.

With an acute patella dislocation, there are usually other injuries, such as tearing the ligaments that stabilize the patella or injury to the quadriceps muscle or tendon. There is also the possibility of a fracture of the medial border of the patella or lateral border of the femur. These bone fractures may be large enough to require surgical repair or become loose bodies that require removal.

Symptoms

- Deformity of the knee
- Acute swelling
- Limited range of motion or a locked knee
- Extreme pain

Treatment

Following a patellar dislocation, the first step is to relocate the kneecap into the femoral groove. This often happens spontaneously as the individual extends the knee either while still on the field of play or in an emergency room as the knee is extended for examination.

Once the kneecap is back in place, the initial treatment is the immobilization of the knee in extension for about a week to 10 days. During this time, the pain and swelling subsides. When comfortable, physical therapy is started in order to regain motion and strength. A patella brace may also be worn to provide a sense of stability until full motion and strength has been achieved, which may take 6 to 12 weeks.

In cases of recurrent patella dislocations, surgical treatment may be needed to stabilize the patella. Depending on associated injuries such as a fracture or ligament laxity, the patella stabilization surgery can be either a soft tissue or a bone procedure, or a combination of both. The recovery and rehabilitation program is dependent upon the extent of the surgery, such that it may take several months to recover.