

What is hip arthroscopy?

- **Hip arthroscopy is an established form of keyhole surgery that is an important treatment option for those patients experiencing common hip problems**
- **Using small cameras and telescopes, damage inside the hip, such as hip impingement, labral tears and loose bits of cartilage or bone, can be seen and treated**
- **Hip arthroscopy is less invasive than traditional open hip surgery, is often performed as a day-case and may require a shorter stay in hospital compared to traditional open hip surgery**

Hip pain

Hip pain and/or discomfort (or related groin pain, which can often be a sign of problems with the hip joint), affect countless people under the age of 50 and can be caused by many factors including sporting injuries, falls and family history.

In addition to pain, symptoms which suggest there may be a problem with the hip include 'clicking' within the hip joint, a sense that the leg is 'giving out', discomfort in certain positions like kneeling or sitting, or standing up.

The hip joint

The hip, a ball-and-socket joint, is the largest weight bearing joint in the body. It is also one of the most 'buried' joints in the body, which has meant that historically, many common hip problems have gone untreated because practical treatment options were not available.

Hip arthroscopy

Hip arthroscopy is an established form of keyhole surgery that is widely available and an important treatment option for those patients experiencing hip pain and/or discomfort (or related groin pain which can often be a sign of problems with the hip joint). It is less invasive than traditional open hip surgery, is often performed as a day-case and may require a shorter stay in hospital compared to traditional open hip surgery.

Recent advances in technology, coupled with an increased understanding of hip pathology, are enabling surgeons to make better use of hip arthroscopy to investigate, capture images of, and effectively treat previously untreatable hip joint problems.

Common hip problems treatable with hip arthroscopy

- **Hip Impingement** is a disorder caused by a lack of clearance between the head and neck of the femur (thighbone) and the rim of the acetabulum. Due to this lack of clearance, when the hip is flexed, as in many common activities like running, sitting or bending over, the femur and the rim of the acetabulum rub together, causing significant pain in the joint. As a result of extensive contact between the femur and the acetabulum, the labrum may suffer damage, slowly degenerate, and may even cause arthritis in the hip over time.

Hip impingement is more common in athletic men, and any athletic or strenuous activity may further aggravate pain in the groin area. Remaining in a stationary seated position for extended periods of time may also aggravate the condition.

- **Labral tears:** The labrum is a layer of fibrous tissue covered in a synovial membrane that lines the rim of the socket in which the ball of the femur sits. This cartilage provides cushioning for the joint and keeps the femur in place. A tear in the labrum can result either from injury or degeneration due to impingement or other joint conditions. Labral tears can be painful and may cause symptoms such as locking or “catching” in the joint and pain in the hip or groin area.
- **Articular Cartilage Injuries:** Articular cartilage is a layer of material in the hip joint that covers the surface of the femoral head and acetabulum, cushioning them and allowing them to move against each other without causing damage. This cartilage sometimes tears or becomes damaged, either from high impact sports like running or jumping, as a result of friction caused by hip impingement, or from basic wear and tear. When articular cartilage is damaged, the torn fragment often protrudes into the joint, causing pain when the hip is flexed. Also, the bone material beneath the surface no longer has protection from joint friction, which may eventually result in arthritis if left untreated.
- **Loose Bodies:** Removal of loose bodies (small loose fragments of cartilage or bone) is a common reason physicians perform arthroscopic hip surgery. These loose bodies are often the result of trauma, such as a fall, car accident or a sports-related injury, or they may result from degenerative disease. Loose bodies can cause a “catching” in the joint.
- **Snapping Hip Syndrome:** Snapping hip syndrome is characterised by a snapping sensation and an audible click upon flexion and extension of the hip joint. It usually

develops as the result of an acute injury or overuse of the joint. Athletes are particularly at risk due to the repetitive hip flexion involved in sports such as ballet, football, resistance training, rowing, running and gymnastics¹.

Possible complications of hip arthroscopy

Nerve injury is uncommon, but can be an issue with any form of hip surgery. Injury to any of the nerves can cause pain and other problems. Other rare but possible complications associated with hip arthroscopy include additional injury to the hip joint, infection, and continued pain after the surgery².

Patient pathway

If a person is experiencing persistent hip pain and/or discomfort or related groin pain they should make an appointment to see their doctor. There are many non-surgical treatment options including physiotherapy, joint injections in addition to surgical treatment options to treat hip pain.

Typically, a referral from a doctor or physiotherapist to an orthopaedic surgeon with a special interest in the hip is required before a patient would be considered for a hip arthroscopy. Once referred, an orthopaedic surgeon will conduct a thorough evaluation which can include imaging of the hip or pelvis using specialist scanning equipment (e.g., x-ray, MRI or CT). At this point, the surgeon can usually make a diagnosis and work out a treatment plan in partnership with the patient that may include a hip arthroscopy.

For more information

- www.hipproblem.co.uk
- <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arthroscopy>

¹ Garry, J.P. Jenkins, W.L. (2010) *Snapping Hip Syndrome*. [Accessed from <http://emedicine.medscape.com/article/87659-overview> on 14th March 2011]

² Cluett, J. *Hip Arthroscopy: What is a hip arthroscopy?* About.com. [Accessed 5th April 2011. <http://orthopedics.about.com/od/hipinjuries/a/hiparthroscopy.htm>]