Potential Complications--Knee Arthroscopy

Arthroscopic knee surgery is a very successful procedure to relieve pain and improve function of the knee. Fortunately, potential complications are rare and are listed below:

1. Infection occurs in less than 1% of patients. The majority of these are superficial and can be treated with local wound care and antibiotics. Patients with diabetes or weak immune systems are more prone to develop infections.

2. Stiffness. This is much less common with arthroscopic surgery than with open surgery but does occur. This usually is worked out with physical therapy and home exercises.

3. Nerve or blood vessel injuries. These are extremely rare with arthroscopic surgery.

4. Complications due to general medical conditions. Prior to surgery your primary medical doctor will help to get you as healthy as possible.

5. Complications due to anesthesia. Your anesthesiologist will review all the risks of anesthesia with you before surgery and address any concerns.

6. Residual pain. Sometimes surgery can only relieve a portion of the pain. For example, if the patient has significant arthritis in addition to other problems, some ache may remain from the arthritis. The reason for this is that we cannot reverse arthritis (yet!) or “put tread back on the tire”. We can, however, make a rough surface smooth and this can provide good, if not total, relief.

7. Swelling or bleeding. Sometimes, the operated knee can swell after surgery. If this becomes too uncomfortable or interferes with recovery it may require drainage with a needle in the office.

While complications are rare, sometimes further surgery can be required if any of these occur. In almost all cases, arthroscopic knee surgery will result in good improvement in pain and function. If a complication does occur, every effort will be made to ensure a good result.