



West Toronto Veterinary Surgery
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Arthroscopy

What is Arthroscopy?

Arthroscopy is an orthopedic surgical procedure used to identify, diagnose, and treat problems inside a joint. The word arthroscopy comes from two Greek words, “arthro” (joint) and “skopein” (to look). In an arthroscopic examination, an orthopedic surgeon makes a small incision in the patient’s skin and then inserts a pencil-sized fiberoptic instrument containing a lighting system and small lens that magnifies the structures inside the joint. By attaching the arthroscope to camera attached to a larger monitor, the surgeon is able to see the interior of the joint through this very small incision, rather than a larger incision needed for an open surgical approach. Arthroscopy is generally easier on the patient than “open” surgery. Most patients are discharged the next day.



Why is Arthroscopy Needed?

Diagnosing joint injuries and disease begins with a thorough medical history, physical examination, and usually radiographs. Additional tests such as a magnetic resonance imaging (MRI), or computed tomography (CT) may also be recommended. Through the arthroscope a final diagnosis is made, which may be more accurate than through “open” surgery or from radiographic studies.

Disease and injuries can damage bones, cartilage, ligaments, muscles, and tendons. Some of the most frequent conditions found during arthroscopic examination of joints are:

- Inflammation e.g., synovitis—Inflamed lining (synovium) in the shoulder, elbow, stifle (knee), and hock (ankle).
- Injury—Acute and chronic e.g., meniscal (cartilage) tears in the stifle, and cranial cruciate ligament tears with and without instability.
- Loose bodies of bone and/or cartilage e.g., fracture fragments, or loose or eroded cartilage flaps. These may occur in shoulder, elbow, hock and stifle joints.



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Although the inside of nearly all joints can be viewed with an arthroscope, the three joints most frequently examined with arthroscopy include the shoulder, elbow, and stifle.

The most common conditions that are diagnosed and treated with arthroscopy include fragmented medial coronoid process (FCP), osteochondritis dissecans (OCD), biceps tenosynovitis, cranial cruciate ligament damage or meniscal injuries, and osteoarthritis.

Although uncommon, complications do occasionally occur during or following arthroscopy. The most common potential complication is leakage of fluid (used to flush the joint during the procedure) into surrounding tissues. This is a minor, non-painful complication that results in the swollen appearance of tissues for 24-48 hours after surgery. Infection, excessive swelling or bleeding, damage to blood vessels or nerves, and instrument breakage are other potential complications, but occur in less than 1% of all arthroscopic procedures.

How is Arthroscopy Performed?



Arthroscopic surgery, although much easier in terms of recovery than “open” surgery, still requires the use of anesthetics and the special equipment in a hospital operating room. The patient will be given a general and local anesthetic, depending on the joint or suspected problem.

A small incision (about the size of a small buttonhole) will be made to insert the arthroscope. Several other small incisions may be made to see other parts of the joint or insert other instruments.

When indicated, corrective surgery is performed with specifically designed instruments that are inserted into the joint through accessory incisions. The amount of surgery required and the recovery time will depend on the complexity of the problem and the joint involved.

Occasionally, in less than 10% of cases during arthroscopy, the surgeon may discover that the injury or disease cannot be treated adequately with arthroscopy alone. The conversion to an “open” surgery may then be performed.



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Recovery From Arthroscopy

After arthroscopic surgery the incisions will be covered with bandages, which will usually be removed by the time your pet goes home.

Upon discharge, you will be given instructions regarding your pet's incisions, what activities to avoid, and which exercises will aid in recovery.

During the re-evaluation visit 10-14 days after surgery, the surgeon will inspect the incision(s) and remove sutures. Specific medication and a rehabilitation program may be suggested to speed your pet's recovery and protect future joint function.

It is anticipated that patients will return to their normal activity levels within 4-6 weeks after arthroscopic surgery.

Remember that patients who have arthroscopic surgery can have many different diagnoses and pre-existing conditions, so each patient's arthroscopic surgery is unique, and recovery time may reflect that individuality.





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Hours

Monday to Friday

8:00am to 6:00pm

Emergencies are welcome!

