Physical therapy as effective as surgery for some knee problems

By ACSH Staff — March 22, 2013

Ever had surgery for a tear in your medial meniscus, the hard rubber-like cartilage in your knee? No less than three ACSH staffers have. But maybe it wasn’t necessary, a new study suggests.

Researchers at seven major universities and orthopedic surgery centers randomly assigned 351 people with meniscus tears to either get surgery or have six months of physical therapy. Thirty percent of patients assigned to physical therapy ended up opting for the surgery, generally because they felt the rehab wasn’t helping them. But after six months all members of both groups had similar rates of functional improvement and pain relief.

The results of the study were published in the New England Journal of Medicine.

ACSH’s Dr. Gilbert Ross calls the study fascinating, but says he thinks most people would rather have the surgery and get it over with, rather than endure a long series of physical therapy sessions. He was up and walking just two days after having surgery back in 2007, and running again 2 months thereafter.

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