

Kneecap Fracture Fixation — Pre-Operative Patient Guide

Colby Wollenman, M.D.

Patella Fracture (Broken Kneecap) — Open Reduction and Internal Fixation (ORIF)

Your Condition & Procedure

The condition

The **patella** (kneecap) is a bone at the front of the knee that links the thigh muscle to the shin bone and lets you straighten the leg. It usually breaks from a fall directly onto the knee or a forceful pull of the thigh muscle. A displaced break causes pain, swelling, and trouble straightening the knee or walking.

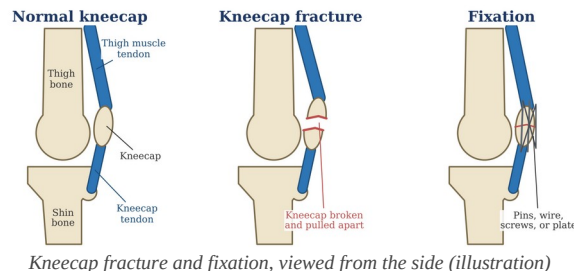
The surgery

This is a typically outpatient surgery through an incision over the front of the knee. The pieces are put back together, restoring the smooth joint surface, and held with pins and wire, screws, sutures, or a small plate. If a small piece is shattered, it may be removed and the tendon reattached to the rest of the kneecap. The final plan is determined during surgery.

Risks & benefits

Benefits: Restoring the kneecap lets you straighten the knee with strength again and walk normally.

Risks are uncommon and include infection, blood clots, hardware irritation (common; often removed later), the bone healing slowly or not at all, weakness straightening the knee, pain with kneeling, kneecap arthritis over time, injury to nearby structures (such as nerves, blood vessels, or cartilage), stiffness, persistent pain, and the need for further surgery. These will be reviewed with you in detail before surgery.



Before Surgery

- **Medications:** We will tell you what to stop and when (e.g., blood thinners, anti-inflammatories, some supplements, weight-loss injections).
- **Fasting:** Follow the instructions from your surgery coordinator/facility. In general, you should have nothing to eat or drink starting at midnight the night before surgery.
- **Nicotine:** Stop all nicotine products—they slow healing.
- **Equipment:** A knee brace (locked straight) and crutches are typically arranged beforehand. Practice with crutches.
- **Physical therapy:** Schedule your first visit for within about a week after surgery.
- **Home:** Plan for a helper for the first few days and remove trip hazards.
- **Medical history:** Let us know if you or anyone in your family has a history of blood clot disorders or a malignant hyperthermia reaction to anesthesia.
- **Health:** Call us if you develop a fever, illness, or skin problem near the knee.

Day of Surgery

- If instructed, take blood pressure/heart medications with a small sip of water.
- Arrive at the time given by your surgery coordinator.
- Bring your medication list, insurance card, photo ID, and brace/crutches if you have them.
- Wear loose clothing; leave jewelry and valuables at home.
- A responsible adult must drive you home. You may **not** drive yourself.

Immediately After Surgery

- You will recover in the recovery area; most patients go home the same day.
- Your surgeon will discuss the procedure with you and your support person.
- Your care team will review wound care, restrictions, medications, follow-up, and warning signs before discharge.

Milestone	What to Expect After Surgery (General Timeline)
Brace & weight	Full weight right away with crutches and the brace locked straight for walking and sleep for 6 weeks. Brace and crutches are then weaned over 2 weeks.
Motion	During PT exercises: bending to 90° for 4 weeks, then 120° by 6 weeks (less if part of the kneecap was removed). Stationary bike from 6 weeks. In some cases, bending will be delayed longer
Daily life	Desk work often within 1–2 weeks. Leg press and squats to 90° start between 8 and 10 weeks. No driving while taking narcotic pain medication.
Running	Typically ~4 months, once thigh strength reaches 80% of the other side.
Sports	Agility and sports at 5–6 months, after strength and hop testing.
► Please note: This is a general guide only. Detailed post-operative instructions will be provided on the day of surgery, and your restrictions and timeline may change based on the findings and procedures performed.	

Learn More

We **strongly recommend** reading these pages from the American Academy of Orthopaedic Surgeons (OrthoInfo) before your surgery:

- **Your condition: Patellar Fractures (Broken Kneecap)** — <https://orthoinfo.org/en/diseases--conditions/patellar-kneecap-fractures/>
- **Your procedure: Internal Fixation for Fractures** — <https://orthoinfo.org/en/treatment/internal-fixation-for-fractures/>

Video: You may find a video demonstrating an example (not the exact technique) of your surgery at

<https://patient.orthopedica.com/student/activity/2644664-kneecap-fractures-patella-fractures> (or browse <https://patient.orthopedica.com/student/catalog>).

Questions before surgery? Call our office at (972) 378-1438. For a medical emergency, call 911.