**Knee operations for middle-aged 'no better than exercising', research claims**

* **Knee ops carried out on middle-aged patients may be a waste of time**
* **Keyhole surgery to repair torn meniscus is one of the NHS' most common**
* **Study suggests treatment is no more effective than doing simple exercises**

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Knee operations carried out on thousands of middle-aged patients every year may be a waste of time, research suggests.

Keyhole surgery to repair a torn meniscus – the cartilage between the two halves of the knee joint – is one of the most common procedures on the NHS.

Yet a study suggests the treatment is no more effective than doing simple exercises.

More than 150,000 Britons undergo arthroscopic keyhole surgery to their knees every year, most of them in their 50s, 60s and 70s.

Repairing the meniscus is among the most common reason for this procedure.

The cartilage is often damaged by twisting the knee while running or playing football.

Surgeons use an arthroscope – a tiny camera at the end of a tube – to enter the knee while they carry out surgery through small incisions in the skin.

The procedure usually takes less than an hour and patients often return home the same day.

But the ease and simplicity of the operation means it is often an option for patients who would never have been considered for surgery in the past.

The latest study, published last night in the British Medical Journal, compared patients in Norway who had the operation to those who carried out a 12-week programme of simple muscle-strengthening exercises.

Even without repairing the cartilage, strengthening muscles around the knee helps support the joint and can ease pain.

The researchers, from Oslo University Hospital and the University of Southern Denmark, found ‘no clinically relevant difference’ between the two groups.

The 140 patients in the trial were assessed after three months – at which point the non-surgery group was actually performing better – and again at two years when there was little difference between them.

The two groups had the same results when it came to pain, mobility and the ability to do sport.

One in five patients from the exercise group later underwent surgery, but saw no extra benefit.

The authors wrote: ‘Supervised exercise therapy showed positive effects over surgery in improving thigh muscle strength, at least in the short term.’

Experts writing in a separate editorial in the BMJ claim growing evidence that knee operations are ineffective is being ignored.

Teppo Jarvinen, of the University of Helsinki, and Gordon Guyatt, of McMaster University in Ontario, Canada, said: ‘What we should not do is allow the orthopaedic community ... to ignore the results of rigorous trials and continue widespread use of procedures for which there has never been compelling evidence.’

Professor Andy Carr, an expert in orthopaedic surgery at Oxford University, last year called for keyhole surgery to be scrapped for middle-aged patients.

He said even though complications are rare it does carry a risk, adding: ‘Supporting or justifying a procedure with the potential for serious harm ... is difficult when that procedure offers patients no more benefit than a placebo.’

Read more: <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/health/article-3700440/Knee-operations-middle-aged-no-better-exercising-Simplicity-meniscus-surgery-means-thousands-patients-having-treatment-not-considered-previously.html#ixzz4KQxhloZA>   
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