

A CATASTROPHIC COMPLICATION DURING ARTHROSCOPIC KNEE SURGERY

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Introduction: Among potential complications of arthroscopic knee surgery that can be missed during surgery is acute compartment syndrome of the thigh and the calf. It's a rare complication and seldom detected during the first half an hour into the surgery. We present a case of an arthroscopy-assisted anterior cruciate ligament reconstruction and meniscus repair surgery abandoned within 23 minutes after the commencement of the procedure due to compartment syndrome. Since it's uncommon, surgeons performing the procedure may overlook the surgery and tend not to monitor its signs. This report is to highlight this particular pitfall to avoid this complication.

Discussion: One possible cause of acute compartment syndrome is extravasation of fluid during the procedure. Extravasation may be due the presence of fascial defects, previous knee trauma possibly causing injury to capsule and the ligaments. In our case, arthroscopy was performed 11 months after the initial injury, giving enough time for soft tissue and capsule to heal hence lowering the risk of fluid extravasation. CT of the knee demonstrated a ruptured baker's cyst as the cause of the extravasation. Fortunately, the patient responded well to intensive conservative treatment owing to the swift abort of the procedure and quick reabsorption of the fluid from the affected compartment(s).

Conclusion: High clinical index of suspicion of compartment syndrome is necessary to derive an early diagnosis. When compartment syndromes are suspected, the important immediate measure is wide-splitting of any constricting dressings that have been applied. Surgery is the treatment of choice if conservative treatment fails. Summarily, keeping this complication in mind and paying attentions to simple details like making sure surrounding drapes are not constricting along with regular examination of the calf and thigh during procedure, usage of gravity flow irrigation and meticulous attention to tourniquet time can avoid such catastrophic incidence.