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Physician Publication

GETTING BACK IN THE GAME FASTER

After playing basketball for 35 years on concrete surfaces, Mitch Martinez gradually began to feel the effects on his 40-something-year-old knees. In one knee particularly, he knew something was wrong, and the pain became more pronounced each time he played. “It felt like a hamstring injury—but in my knee. Sometimes the cramping sensation was so strong, I had to sit out part of my game.”

Mitch, a business owner from Marlboro, doesn’t recall a single point in time that the injury occurred. “I really only experienced the knee pain when I was playing. But over the course of time, the pain became more significant.”

Finally, Mitch asked one of his basketball league teammates, Gregg S. Berkowitz, MD, of Advanced Orthopedics and Sports Medicine Institute, for assistance. Dr. Berkowitz, a board-certified orthopedic surgeon, is Director of the Cartilage Restoration Center, a division of AOSMI devoted to the treatment of cartilage injuries of the knee and other joints. After a consultation, a magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) scan was recommended to identify the problem, and help determine a course of action.

THE MICROFRACTURE TECHNIQUE

The MRI revealed damage to the knee cartilage. Dr. Berkowitz recommended an arthroscopic surgical procedure called the microfracture technique, which allows for the regrowth of new cartilage. “This procedure, one of several available to repair damaged cartilage, uses the body’s own healing abilities and provides an enriched environment for cartilage regrowth at the affected area,” notes Dr. Berkowitz.

Signs and symptoms of a knee cartilage injury, some of which may require the microfracture technique, are intermittent swelling, pain with prolonged activity, hearing “noise” from the knee during motion, and knee locking, catching, or giving way. The procedure is not appropriate for arthritis patients, however.

SURGERY CONVENIENCE

Mitch was ready to move forward with the surgical repair of his knee. The procedure was performed as a same day surgery, and Mitch was on his way home later that afternoon. “I had

undergone other surgeries so I was prepared for a lot of pain. But because this was an arthroscopic procedure, it was a completely different experience. In fact, I only used crutches for two days.”

Mitch was driving his car and back to work less than a week after surgery. A few months later, after a period of rehabilitation, he gradually returned to the action on the basketball court.

Reflecting on his decision to proceed with the surgery, he notes, “I’ll be honest. I was skeptical about how much this surgery would actually decrease the pain in my knee. I had no idea the improvement would be this significant.”

This article originally appeared in the July/August 2008 edition of Healthy Directions from CentraState. Edited by Dr. Gregg Berkowitz

The Cartilage Center of New Jersey provides multiple treatment options for cartilage injuries, including arthroscopy, microfracture, Osteochondral Autograft and Allograft Transplantation, Autologous Chondrocyte Implantation, De Novo NT, Arthroscopic limited joint resurfacing, Unicompartamental Knee Replacement, and Osteotomy.

Orthopedic Surgeons on Staff of the Cartilage Restoration Center:

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