

# & Joint News

## Bone

TRI RIVERS SURGICAL ASSOCIATES

FALL/WINTER 2006

# Meniscus Tears

## A COMMON KNEE INJURY

**Snap, crackle and pop** are sounds you'd expect to hear from your breakfast cereal, not your joints. But that's just the noise Dennis' knee made when he rose from the kitchen table one morning.

"While standing up, I felt a pop in my knee and lost my balance," he said. "Pain and swelling made it difficult to walk. Crackling and snapping sensations occurred anytime I moved my knee."



Dennis, 59, a comptroller for the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, consulted his physician at Tri Rivers Surgical Associates, who diagnosed a torn meniscus, one of the most common knee injuries.

"The meniscus acts as a shock absorber between the femur (thigh bone) and tibia (shin-bone)," said William D. Abraham, M.D., an orthopedic surgeon with Tri Rivers, who is fellowship trained in joint surgery.

Injury to the meniscus may result from arthritic tears associated with aging or can occur from an acute injury, explained

Dr. Abraham. When a tear occurs the meniscus moves abnormally within the joint. This movement can cause further damage to the articular cartilage if not properly treated. Because the meniscus has no blood supply, it cannot heal on its own.

Like Dennis, many people report feeling a pop-

ping sensation in their knee at the time of a meniscus injury. Other symptoms may include pain and swelling, an inability to bear weight on the injured leg and locking of the joint.

"Symptoms of a torn meniscus can wax and wane over time in terms of levels of pain and discomfort," Dr. Abraham said.


After conducting a physical examination and obtaining an X-ray, the physician will prescribe treatment based on the severity of the symptoms, the patient's age and desired activity level. An MRI may be necessary for further diagnosis.

"Symptoms may diminish within four to six weeks of conservative treatments, such as rest, ice, the use of anti-inflammatory medication and possibly a cortisone injection. Patients who do not respond well to conservative treatments and want to remain active usually require surgery," Dr. Abraham explained.

Dennis underwent outpatient arthroscopic surgery to treat his meniscus tear. During the procedure, his physician used two to three small incisions and a miniature telescopic instrument, called an arthroscope, to look inside the joint and remove the torn cartilage.

"After a few days, I could walk without crutches, and in four to six weeks I could go about my usual activities without pain," he said.

According to Dr. Abraham, Dennis' results are typical. Most patients can expect to resume daily activities within a few days and more rigorous exercise, including sports, about six weeks following surgery.



# Is Carpal Tunnel Syndrome ON YOUR NERVES?

Pittsburghers know bottlenecked traffic at the Fort Pitt Tunnel is nerve-wracking. But for drivers with carpal tunnel syndrome — a type of traffic jam in the wrist — just gripping the steering wheel can be downright painful.

The carpal tunnel is a narrow passageway in the wrist surrounded by bones and ligaments. This space contains multiple tendons and the median nerve, a major nerve that carries messages between the hand and the brain.

"Carpal tunnel syndrome occurs when tendons within the carpal tunnel become inflamed and compress the median nerve. As a result, the nerve becomes constricted, much like traffic flow at rush hour," said Trenton M. Gause, M.D., an orthopedic surgeon and upper extremity specialist at Tri Rivers.

Symptoms associated with carpal tunnel can detour daily activities.

"Patients suffering from carpal tunnel syndrome often complain of pain and numbness in the hand and wrist," said Dr. Gause. "Many describe feeling a pins-and-needles sensation that may spread into the forearm. Some find it difficult to grasp objects — like a steering wheel. Others experience symptoms that awaken them from sleep."

A variety of treatment options are available to relieve carpal tunnel syndrome symptoms.

After conducting a physical examination and diagnostic tests, an orthopedic surgeon will determine the best treatment option. For many people, carpal tunnel syndrome can be treated successfully without surgery.



## Physician Named "Top Doc"

Robert L. Waltrip, M.D., an orthopedic surgeon with Tri Rivers, has been named a top doctor in both the Pittsburgh region and the country by *Pittsburgh Magazine* and Castle Connolly Medical Ltd.

Dr. Waltrip provides a full scope of sports medicine and shoulder-related services to patients at Tri Rivers' Butler Bone and Joint Center and at our new Cranberry/Mars office location.

## Tri Rivers Has Landed in Mars

Tri Rivers Surgical announces the addition of a new office, located just off Rt. 228 in the Cranberry/Mars corridor. This new site will offer convenience of care to our patients in Cranberry, Mars and surrounding communities. Drs. D. Kelly Agnew, Robert L. Waltrip and S. Joshua Szabo will provide a wide range of sports medicine and general orthopedic services at the new office, including:

- Management of bone and joint disorders
- Management of sports medicine injuries
- Arthroscopic surgery
- Total joint replacement
- Upper extremity specialty care
- Fracture care
- Diagnosis and treatment of other orthopedic concerns

Patients may schedule an appointment at any Tri Rivers location by calling toll free 1-866-874-7483.

"In most cases, initial treatment will involve the use of a splint worn at night to stabilize the wrist and control swelling. Anti-inflammatory medications may also be recommended," said Josh Szabo, M.D., an orthopedic surgeon and sports medicine specialist at Tri Rivers. "When these conservative therapies are not effective, carpal tunnel release surgery may be necessary.

"During carpal tunnel release, the surgeon will cut the transverse carpal ligament, which forms the roof of the carpal tunnel. This procedure creates more room for the median nerve to pass through the wrist and usually provides permanent relief of symptoms," he said.

If you experience numbness, tingling or weakness in your hands, Drs. Gause and Szabo advise seeking early medical intervention from a physician who is experienced in managing carpal tunnel syndrome.

## Signs of Carpal Tunnel Syndrome

If you experience any of the following symptoms, steer to your orthopedic specialists office for a carpal tunnel syndrome evaluation.

- Trouble gripping objects
- Pain in your wrist, palm or forearm
- Numbness or tingling in your hand and fingers
- Pain or numbness that awakens you from sleep

## Sports Medicine Specialist Joins Tri Rivers' Team

Tri Rivers is pleased to welcome S. Joshua Szabo, M.D., a sports medicine and shoulder specialist, to its practice.



Dr. Szabo received his medical degree from Hahnemann University in Philadelphia, where he also completed his internship in general surgery. He completed his orthopedic surgery residency at Drexel University's College of Medicine and an orthopedic sports medicine fellowship at the prestigious Mississippi Sports Medicine and Orthopaedic Center in Jackson, Miss. Dr. Szabo has written numerous articles about orthopedic surgery techniques and participated in several clinical studies. He lectures nationally on topics such as arthroscopic shoulder surgery and knee ligament reconstruction techniques. Additionally, he regularly teaches other orthopedic surgeons advanced arthroscopic skills for the shoulder, elbow and wrist at the Orthopaedic Learning Center in Rosemont, Ill. Dr. Szabo also serves as the team physician for several area high schools.

While caring for patients at Tri Rivers, Dr. Szabo will provide a full scope of orthopedic services, including:

- Arthroscopic surgery of the shoulder, elbow, wrist, knee and ankle
- Complex shoulder and elbow reconstructions, including rotator cuff repairs
- Treatment of knee conditions, and ACL reconstruction
- Hand and upper extremity specialty care
- Fracture care
- Diagnosis and treatment of other orthopedic concerns

To schedule an appointment with Dr. Szabo or another Tri Rivers physician, call toll free 1-866-874-7483.



## Multimodal knee replacement may mean less pain for patients

Patients delaying total knee replacement surgery for fear of post-surgical pain may find they have less to worry about, thanks to a newer approach called multimodal knee replacement.

"Multimodal total knee replacement combines minimally invasive surgical techniques with a pain-management regime that may significantly reduce post-operative pain, accelerate rehabilitation and lead to improved surgical outcomes," said Thomas S. Muzzonigro, M.D., an orthopedic surgeon at Tri Rivers Surgical Associates.

Minimally invasive joint replacement, a surgical procedure that requires a smaller incision than traditional joint replacement, is designed to spare tissue and reduce recovery time.

"Compared to traditional knee replacement, minimally invasive surgery may result in less trauma to the knee, decreased blood loss, a shorter hospital stay, accelerated rehabilitation, motion and quicker recovery," Dr. Muzzonigro said.

Combining minimally invasive surgery with advancements in pain management keeps patients more comfortable than traditional methods. It can also promote healing by enabling a patient to engage more actively in rehabilitation.

"We work closely with hospital anesthesiologists to prescribe an individualized pain-management plan for each patient," Dr. Muzzonigro said.

When using the multimodal approach, pain management often begins before surgery with a prescription of oral anti-inflammatory medications. The patient is kept comfortable during surgery using general or epidural anesthesia. After the procedure, a nerve block or intravenous medications may provide additional pain relief.

If you are considering total joint replacement surgery, ask your Tri Rivers physician if you may be a candidate for the multimodal approach.

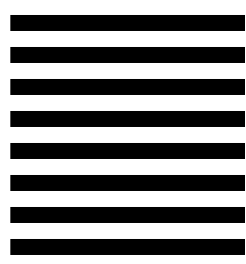


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*Orthopedic Surgery and  
 Musculoskeletal Medicine*

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