

Bilateral fabellar impingement after knee replacement—a case report

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A 64-year-old woman had bilateral total knee replacement (Anatomical Graduated Components, Biomet, Warsaw, IN, USA) with resurfacing of the patella, because of arthrosis. No special attention was given to bilateral fabellae, smaller on the right than on the left side. The postoperative period was uneventful. After 3 months, the range of movement was 0°–120° in both knees and there was no pain.

After 1 year, the patient complained of pain in the lateral part of the popliteal fossa on both sides and tenderness in the same location. Painful clicking was induced when the knees were extended from full flexion. The symptoms were most pronounced on the left side. Radiographs showed the posterior part of the femoral components extending a few millimeters behind the lateral femoral condyle and catching of the fabellae was suspected (Figure).

15 months after the primary operation, bilateral fabellectomy was performed. During surgery, catching of the fabellae against the edge of the femoral component was noticed. The pain and clicking disappeared immediately and have not returned after a 1-year further follow-up.

Discussion

Fabella is seen in about 12% of the adult population (Falk 1963) and seldom causes symptoms. Jaffe et al. (1988) first described a case of pain due to fabellar impingement after total knee replacement. The fabel-

la was large and cinematography and peroperative findings showed that the impingement was against the tibial component. Larson and Becker (1993) reported another case with a very large fabella impinging against the tibial polyethylene. In both cases, fabellectomy relieved the symptoms.

Laird (1991) described a case of painful articulation between the fabella and the femoral component. Again the symptoms disappeared after removal of the fabella.

Contrary to the previous cases, our patient had an impingement of the fabella on the edge of the femoral component in both knees. The symptoms started 1 year postoperatively. The late appearance of pain and clicking is probably due to disappearance of all swelling and joint effusion at that time. The fabellae were not large, and no clicking was noticed during the first operation when testing the range of movement.

References

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Both knees. The overhanging edge of the femoral components may catch the fabellae.

