Osteochondroses Encyclopedia Article

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Osteochondroses

Osteochondroses refers to a group of diseases of children and adolescents in which bone tissue dies, and is usually replaced with healthy bone tissue. The singular term is osteochondrosis.

During the years of rapid bone growth, the growing ends of bones (epiphyses) may not receive enough blood supply to keep the bone tissue alive. Since bone is normally undergoing a continuous rebuilding process, the dead (necrotic) tissue usually repairs itself over a period of weeks or months.

Osteochondrosis can affect different areas of the body and is often categorized by its location as articular, non-articular, or physeal osteochondrosis. Physeal osteochondrosis is known as Scheuermann's disease. It occurs in the spine at the joints between vertebrae (known as physes), especially in the chest region. Articular disease occurs at the joints (articulations). One of the more common forms is Legg-Calvé-Perthes disease, occurring at the hip. Other forms include Köhler's disease (foot), Freiberg's disease (second toe), and Panner's disease (elbow). Freiberg's disease is the one type of osteochondrosis that is more common in females than in males. All others affect the sexes equally. Non-articular osteochondrosis occurs at any other skeletal location. For instance, Osgood-Schlatter disease of the tibia (the large inner bone of the leg between the knee and ankle) is relatively common.

No one knows exactly why osteochondrosis develops. Stress and ischemia (reduced blood supply) are two of the most commonly mentioned factors. Athletic young children are often affected when they overstress their developing limbs with a particular repetitive motion. In many cases, no specific cause can be found.

The most common symptom for most types of osteochondrosis is simply pain at the affected joint, especially when pressure is applied. Locking of a joint or limited range of motion at a joint can also occur.

Scheuermann's disease can lead to kyphosis (hunchback condition) due to the wearing down of the vertebrae. Usually, however, the kyphosis is mild, causing no further symptoms and requiring no special treatment.

In many cases, simply resting the affected body part for a period of days or weeks will bring relief from osteochondrosis. A cast may be applied if needed to prevent movement of a joint. Some patients heal with no treatment at all. Others heal with little treatment other than keeping weight or stress off the affected limb. The younger a person is when osteochondrosis occurs, the better the prospects for full recovery.