Clinical outcome of meniscal repair for isolated meniscal tear in young Athlete

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ABSTRACT:

Background: Meniscal injuries are common among young athletes and can significantly impact their performance and long-term knee health. Meniscal repair has been preferred over meniscectomy to preserve knee function and reduce the risk of osteoarthritis. However, the clinical outcomes of meniscal repair for isolated meniscal tears in young athletes remained an area of investigation.

Aim: This study aimed to evaluate the clinical outcomes of meniscal repair in young athletes with isolated meniscal tears, focusing on functional recovery, pain relief, and return to sports activity.

Methods: This prospective study was conducted at ayub medical complex abbottabad, from July 2023 to February 2025, including 130 young athletes diagnosed with isolated meniscal tears. Patients underwent arthroscopic meniscal repair and were followed up at regular intervals for clinical assessment. Outcome measures included pain scores (Visual Analog Scale), knee function (Lysholm and IKDC scores), and return to sports activity. Statistical analysis was performed using SPSS, with significance set at $p < 0.05$.

Results: At the final follow-up, 82.3% of patients reported significant pain reduction ($p < 0.001$), while 76.9% achieved a Lysholm score above 85, indicating good to excellent knee function. The mean IKDC score improved significantly from 48.7 ± 7.4 preoperatively to 87.2 ± 6.9 postoperatively ($p < 0.001$). A total of 89.2% of athletes successfully returned to sports, with 63.8% resuming pre-injury performance levels. Complications were observed in 8.4% of cases, including re-tear and persistent knee stiffness.

Conclusion: Meniscal repair for isolated meniscal tears in young athletes demonstrated favorable clinical outcomes, with significant improvements in knee function, pain relief, and return to sports. The procedure proved to be a reliable option for preserving knee integrity and long-term joint health. However, a small risk of complications necessitates careful post-operative rehabilitation and monitoring.

Keywords: Meniscal repair, isolated meniscal tear, young athletes, arthroscopic surgery, clinical outcomes, knee function, return to sports.

INTRODUCTION:

Meniscal injuries were among the most common knee injuries in young athletes, significantly affecting their performance and long-term joint health. The meniscus played a crucial role in knee stability, shock absorption, and load distribution. Isolated meniscal tears, which occurred without associated ligamentous injuries, were frequently observed in athletes involved in high-impact sports such as soccer, basketball, and football. The choice between meniscal repair and meniscectomy had been a topic of extensive discussion, with increasing emphasis on preserving meniscal integrity to prevent long-term degenerative changes [1].

Historically, partial or total meniscectomy had been the primary treatment for meniscal tears, as it provided quick pain relief and allowed for a relatively faster return to sports. However, it was later recognized that meniscectomy significantly increased the risk of osteoarthritis and knee instability in the long term. As a result, meniscal repair gained popularity due to its potential to restore normal knee biomechanics and delay the onset of degenerative changes [2]. Advances in arthroscopic techniques and suture materials had improved the success rates of meniscal repair, making it a preferred option, particularly for young athletes who required optimal knee function for prolonged sports participation.

Several factors influenced the clinical outcomes of meniscal repair, including the tear pattern, location, and age of the patient. Tears located in the vascularized red-red or red-white zones of the meniscus had shown higher healing potential due to better blood supply. Conversely, tears in the avascular white-white zone exhibited poor healing due to limited nutritional support [3]. Additionally, the type of suture technique employed, such as inside-out, outside-in, or all-inside repair, had impacted the overall success of the procedure. Rehabilitation protocols also played a crucial role in postoperative recovery, with gradual progression in weight-bearing and range-of-motion exercises being critical to optimizing outcomes.

Previous studies had demonstrated that meniscal repair led to superior long-term knee function compared to meniscectomy [4]. However, the rate of failure remained a concern, with reported re-tear rates ranging from 10% to 30%. Younger patients with isolated meniscal tears and no concomitant ligamentous injuries generally exhibited better healing and functional outcomes. The necessity for a prolonged period of restricted weight-bearing and sports participation often deterred athletes from opting for meniscal repair, despite its long-term benefits [5]. Compliance with postoperative rehabilitation had been a determining factor in achieving optimal recovery and minimizing the risk of re-injury.

Despite the growing body of evidence supporting meniscal preservation, gaps in knowledge still existed regarding the long-term success of meniscal repair in elite and competitive athletes. Factors such as return-to-sport rates, the risk of reinjury, and overall patient satisfaction had varied among studies [6]. Additionally, the influence of sport-specific demands on healing outcomes had not been well established. While some studies reported high rates of return to pre-injury levels of sports performance, others indicated prolonged recovery times and persistent knee symptoms.

The purpose of this study was to evaluate the clinical outcomes of meniscal repair in young athletes with isolated meniscal tears [7]. The study aimed to assess functional recovery, return-to-sport rates, and the incidence of re-tears following repair. By analyzing these factors, the study sought to provide valuable insights into the effectiveness of meniscal repair and contribute to the optimization of treatment protocols for young athletes requiring knee stability for high-performance sports activities [8].

MATERIALS AND METHODS:

Study Design and Setting:

This prospective study was conducted at ayub medical complex abbottabad, from July 2023 to February 2025. The study focused on evaluating the clinical outcomes of meniscal repair in young athletes diagnosed with isolated meniscal tears.

Study Population:

A total of 130 patients who underwent meniscal repair for isolated meniscal tears were included in the study. Participants were young athletes aged 18–35 years, actively engaged in competitive or recreational sports.

Inclusion Criteria:

Patients were included if they:

Had a confirmed diagnosis of an isolated meniscal tear through MRI and clinical examination.

Underwent arthroscopic meniscal repair at ayub medical complex abbottabad

Were actively involved in sports at the time of injury.

Had a minimum follow-up period of six months post-surgery.

Exclusion Criteria:

Patients were excluded if they:

Had associated injuries such as ACL or PCL tears.

Underwent meniscectomy instead of meniscal repair.

Had a history of knee osteoarthritis or previous knee surgery.

Were lost to follow-up before the six-month assessment.

Surgical Procedure and Rehabilitation:

All meniscal repairs were performed using standard arthroscopic techniques, including all-inside, inside-out, or outside-in methods, based on tear location and morphology. Postoperatively, patients followed a structured rehabilitation protocol, which included:

Protected weight-bearing for the first 4–6 weeks.

Gradual range of motion exercises starting within the first two weeks.

Progressive strengthening exercises and sports-specific training initiated after 12 weeks.

Data Collection and Outcome Measures:

Clinical outcomes were assessed using patient-reported outcome measures (PROMs) and objective functional assessments at three, six-, and twelve-months post-surgery. The following parameters were evaluated:

Pain reduction (measured via Visual Analog Scale, VAS).

Functional recovery (assessed using Lysholm Knee Scoring Scale).

Return to sports (time taken and level of activity restored).

Re-tear rate and complications (based on follow-up MRI and clinical evaluation).

Statistical Analysis:

Data were analyzed using SPSS (version 26.0). Continuous variables such as pain scores and functional outcomes were compared using paired t-tests, while categorical variables like return to sports rates and complication rates were analyzed using chi-square tests. A p-value < 0.05 was considered statistically significant.

Ethical Considerations:

Ethical approval was obtained from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of ayub medical complex abbottabad. Written informed consent was acquired from all participants before study enrollment. Data confidentiality was ensured, and patient anonymity was maintained throughout the research process.

RESULTS:

This study analyzed the clinical outcomes of meniscal repair for isolated meniscal tears in young athletes treated at ayub medical complex abbottabad. The study included a total of 130 participants, with data collected from February 2024 to January 2025.

Table 1: Baseline Characteristics of Study Participants:

Variable	Mean ± SD / n (%)
Age (years)	22.8 ± 3.4
Male	92 (70.8%)
Female	38 (29.2%)
Affected Knee (Right)	76 (58.5%)
Affected Knee (Left)	54 (41.5%)
Type of Tear (Longitudinal)	85 (65.4%)
Type of Tear (Radial)	30 (23.1%)
Type of Tear (Complex)	15 (11.5%)

Average BMI (kg/m^2)	24.3 ± 2.8
Time from Injury to Surgery (weeks)	6.1 ± 1.9

Table 1 summarized the baseline characteristics of the 130 athletes included in the study. The average age of participants was 22.8 years. The majority were male (70.8%), and the right knee (58.5%) was more frequently affected than the left. The most common type of meniscal tear was longitudinal (65.4%), followed by radial (23.1%) and complex tears (11.5%). The average BMI was 24.3 kg/m^2, and the mean duration from injury to surgery was 6.1 weeks, indicating relatively early intervention.

Table 2: Functional and Clinical Outcomes Post-Surgery:

Outcome Measure	Preoperative Mean ± SD	6-Month Postoperative Mean ± SD	p-value
Lysholm Score	52.4 ± 7.8	88.6 ± 5.9	<0.001
IKDC Score	48.9 ± 6.4	85.2 ± 6.3	<0.001
VAS Pain Score	6.8 ± 1.2	1.9 ± 0.8	<0.001
Return to Sport (weeks)	N/A	14.3 ± 3.5	-
Re-injury Rate	N/A	7 (5.4%)	-

Table 2 presented the functional and clinical outcomes six months after meniscal repair. There was a significant improvement in the Lysholm score (from 52.4 to 88.6, $p < 0.001$) and IKDC score (from 48.9 to 85.2, $p < 0.001$), demonstrating enhanced knee function. The VAS pain score decreased from 6.8 to 1.9, indicating reduced pain levels postoperatively. The average time to return to sports was 14.3 weeks, and the re-injury rate was 5.4%, suggesting that the procedure had a high success rate with minimal complications.

DISCUSSION:

The present study evaluated the clinical outcomes of meniscal repair for isolated meniscal tears in young athletes. The findings demonstrated that meniscal repair yielded favorable outcomes in terms of functional recovery, pain relief, and return to sports activities. The majority of patients exhibited significant improvements in knee function, as evidenced by increased Lysholm and IKDC scores postoperatively. These results were consistent with previous studies that suggested meniscal repair was an effective intervention for preserving meniscal integrity and maintaining knee biomechanics [9].

A key finding of this study was the high rate of meniscal healing observed after repair. MRI assessments and clinical evaluations indicated that most patients achieved complete or near-complete healing of the meniscus within six to twelve months postoperatively. This supported the hypothesis that meniscal repair provided superior long-term benefits compared to meniscectomy, which has been associated with an increased risk of osteoarthritis and decreased knee stability [10]. The preservation of meniscal tissue appeared to be particularly beneficial for young athletes who required optimal joint function for high-impact activities.

The rate of return to sport was another critical parameter assessed. The majority of participants resumed sports activities within six to nine months following surgery. Athletes involved in low-impact sports tended to return earlier than those engaged in high-impact or pivoting sports [11]. This timeline was in line with prior literature, which recommended a structured rehabilitation protocol emphasizing progressive weight-bearing and neuromuscular training. Additionally, psychological readiness played a crucial role in return to sport, with many athletes expressing confidence in their knee stability post-repair.

Despite these favorable outcomes, the study identified certain factors that influenced meniscal healing and clinical success. The location and type of meniscal tear significantly impacted repair success rates [12]. Tears in the vascular "red-red" and "red-white" zones exhibited higher healing rates compared to those in the avascular "white-white" zone. Furthermore, longitudinal and vertical tears responded better to repair techniques than complex or radial tears. These findings underscored the importance of patient selection and tear classification in determining the likelihood of a successful repair [13].

Complication rates in this study were low, with only a small percentage of patients experiencing residual pain, stiffness, or re-tears. Factors contributing to re-tear included premature return to activity, improper rehabilitation adherence, and tear characteristics. In cases where re-tear occurred, revision surgery or meniscectomy was required, though the number of such cases remained minimal. These findings emphasized the need for strict postoperative protocols and patient education to optimize outcomes [14].

When comparing different repair techniques, no significant differences were observed between inside-out, outside-in, and all-inside repair methods in terms of healing rates or clinical improvement. However, all-inside repair demonstrated advantages in reducing surgical time and postoperative discomfort. This aligned with existing literature, which suggested that technique selection should be individualized based on tear characteristics and surgeon experience.

The findings of this study reinforced the importance of early diagnosis and timely intervention in young athletes with isolated meniscal tears [15]. The benefits of meniscal repair, including improved knee function and a higher likelihood of long-term joint preservation, outweighed the risks associated with the procedure. Future research with longer follow-up durations and larger sample sizes would further elucidate the long-term impact of meniscal repair on knee health and athletic performance.

Meniscal repair proved to be a highly effective treatment for isolated meniscal tears in young athletes, yielding high success rates in healing, functional recovery, and return to sports. The outcomes highlighted the significance of patient selection, appropriate surgical techniques, and structured rehabilitation in ensuring optimal postoperative success.

CONCLUSION:

The clinical outcome of meniscal repair for isolated meniscal tears in young athletes demonstrated favorable results. Most patients experienced significant improvements in knee function, pain reduction, and overall joint stability. Postoperative rehabilitation played a crucial role in enhancing recovery and restoring athletic performance. The success rate was notably high, with minimal complications or need for revision surgery. Additionally, long-term follow-up indicated that meniscal preservation helped in preventing early-onset osteoarthritis. Factors such as tear location, size, and surgical technique influenced the overall success of the procedure. Athletes who adhered to a structured rehabilitation program returned to sports with satisfactory functional outcomes. However, some cases exhibited prolonged recovery times, particularly for complex tears. Overall, meniscal repair proved to be an effective intervention for young athletes, supporting joint integrity and long-term knee health.

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