Technical note: The deep infrapatellar bursa release in Total Knee Arthroplasty for improved access

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Citation

Abstract
A good exposure to access the knee joint is vital in the successful completion of a Total Knee Arthroplasty (TKA). Various approaches have been described in attempts to increase the exposure during a TKA. Eversion of the patella is usually a routine step in tricompartmental knee replacement surgery (1). Cadaveric studies have shown that eversion of the patella during TKR gives better valgus alignment compared to subluxation of the patella laterally (2). Eversion of the patella can sometimes be difficult and it can cause avulsion of the patellar tendon if undue tension is exerted on the tendon (3). We describe the deep infrapatellar bursal release to make the eversion of the patella much easier and to minimise the stress on the patellar tendon insertion.

ANATOMY
The deep infrapatellar bursa occupies the space between the patella tendon and the anterior aspect of the proximal tibia, proximal to the insertion of the patella tendon onto the tibial tuberosity (Fig. 1).

Figure 1
Figure 1: Sagittal section through the knee joint showing the deep infrapatellar bursa and its relationship to the patellar tendon and anterior tibial cortex.

In an average sized adult knee there is roughly 2 finger-breadth of space between the tibial plateau and the insertion of the patellar tendon on the tibial tuberosity (Fig. 2).
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Figure 2
Figure 2: Anterior aspect of the upper tibia showing attachment of the patella tendon.

Figure 3
Figure 3: Diagram showing release of the infrapatellar bursa during total knee arthroplasty (the skin and subcutaneous tissue has been drawn transparent to appreciate the procedure better).

TECHNIQUE

Once a medial parapatellar approach is made, the medial aspect of the patellar tendon is identified. In most arthritic knees warranting a knee replacement, the deep infrapatellar bursa would be seen fibrosed and it would be stuck to the anterior aspect of the tibia. This would limit the excursion of the tendon while trying to evert the patella. A knife is inserted into the space between the patellar tendon and the anterior aspect of the tibia with the sharp edge directed towards the joint line. The infrapatellar tissue is released by the knife from inferior to superior (figure3).

This additional step makes the patellar tendon more relaxed and eversion of the patella can be easily facilitated. The senior author (TS) has done more than 1500 total knee arthroplasties using this technique. We recommend this procedure as a routine step in all total tricompartmental knee arthroplasties.

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