the role of ultrasound in

Anterior Knee Pain
caused by a plica

how can a asymptomatic plica become symptomatic?
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Preface

The *plicasyndrom in the knee*; that sounds many therapists and physicians familiar. But what should you do with it as a practioner? It is known that symptoms of synovial plicae often overlap with other pathologies, therefore the *plicasyndrom* has gradually been forgotten. The training of the musculature is paramount in virtually all knee-related problems, with the objective of stability, and hence control over the joint. The training of knee muscles, with repeated flexion and extension, and making squats is notorious for developing symptoms in folds that previously had no complaints. In this presentation an option which could be a reason for that.

Further attention to differential diagnostics, therapeutic options and the role of ultrasound...
Plica

inward fold of the ‘synovial membrane’*
thin and pliable in normal state, can be found anywhere in the knee joint but especially suprapatellar, infrapatellar and medial

**asymptomatic**: the plica is irrelevant

**symptomatic**: acute or chronic irritation or inflammation of plica and surrounded tissues, can cause ‘plica syndrome’, the most common version is the medial plica syndrome

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* Synovial plicae are intra-articular fibrous embryonic remnants. Although they are found in approximately 30% of patients, symptomatology is present only in a small number of cases. The medial plica frequently causes pain in the upper and medial edges of the patella, which increases with knee flexion and extension ([Ultrasound-guided pain interventions in the knee region (2014)]).
Plicae around the patellofemoral joint (1)

1. **plica suprapatellaris**: commonly a crescent-shaped* fold arising from the under-surface of the quadriceps. Depending on size and elasticity, suprapatellar plicae may impinge between the quadriceps tendon and femoral trochlea.

2. **plica mediopatellaris**: also known as ‘medial shelf’ from the m. articularis genus running medial of the patella to the infrapatellar fat pad.

3. **plica infrapatellaris**: arising in the intercondylar notch, traversing downwards and forwards in a sagittal plane, blending into the synovium covering the infrapatellar fat pad.

4. **plica lateropatellaris**: counterpart to plica mediopatellaris, traversing from the m. articularis genus toward the infrapatellar fat pad.

*halve-maan-vormig
Plica around the patellofemoral joint (2)

- Plica suprapatellaris (1) and mediopatellaris (2)
- Plica lateralis (3)

F: femur, p: patella, T: tibia, TT: tuberositas tibiae

plica infrapatellaris (4) *

* ligamentum mucosum
Plica mediopatellaris, suprapatellaris and infrapatellaris

A, B and C somewhat modified drawings. The mediopatellar plica (1); the suprapatellar plica/braun (septum in the suprapatellar pouch) (2) and the infrapatellar plica (3). The infrapatellar fat body (Hoffa) is colored yellow.

plica suprapatellaris/longitudinal probe position
P: patella; 1+1: quadriceps tendon; 2: suprapatellar fat pad; 3: prefemoral fat pad; 4: suprapatellar recess;
arrows: plica suprapatellaris; F: femur
Diagnosing a (medial) plica:

1. anamnese:
   exclusion other painsyndromes in the region

2. clinical test:
   Hughstons *
   Stutter **

3. Palpation ***

4. imageforming techniques:
   MRI and Ultrasound
Clinical test plica mediopatellaris: Hughston *

xxx: painfull area’s

* The examiner flexes the knee with medial rotation of the tibia and pressing the patella medially with the heel of the hand and palpating the region just medial to the patella. While flexing and extending the knee a snapping or popping will be felt or heard.
Clinical test plica mediopatellaris: Stutter **

** The patient is seated on the edge of the table with both knees flexed 90 degrees. The examiner places a finger over one patella to palpate during movement. The patient is then instructed to slowly extend the knee. If the test is positive, the patella stutters or jumps between 60 degrees and 45 degrees of flexion.
Palpation in symptomatic medial synovial plica:

Palpation is the best way to localize where the pain is coming from

‘You can feel it as a thickened band running diagonally. When you flick over it, it feels thick and sometimes swollen, and reproduces the patient’s pain.’
Where to locate a medial plica:

under the retinaculum and fibrous membrane

A and B: same image
arrows: synovial membrane/synovial stratum

p: patella; f: femur; f: intra-articular fat; c: cartilage femur; rrrrr: retinaculum; between ** articular capsule*

* The articular capsule consist of two layers, the synovial membrane and the fibrous membrane
Nerves and blood vessels that you have to take into account

SN: saphenous nerve with infrapatellar branch

artery’s and probeposition

saphenous nerve (transverse)

vm: M. vastus medialis; sa: M. sartorius; fa: femoral artery; sn: saphenus nerve
Symptoms medial plica

1. antero medial knee pain: 75% of cases
2. clicking: 50% of cases,
3. tenderness on palpation,
4. reduced knee range of movement: 8% of cases
5. difficulty with loading tasks
6. giving way knee joint
7. hydrops
8. atrophied quadriceps

*Synovial plicae of the knee

https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/105c/8e86cfeac5058ce30d9a368fc856855efc6d.pdf
Exclusion other causes

1. referred pain medial joint line
2. medial collateral ligament injury
3. patellofemoral syndrome
4. infrapatellar fat irritation
5. torn meniscus
6. chondral lesions femoral condyl
7. bone bruise
8. periostitis
9. neuritis n. saphenus (infrapatellar branch)
10. Osgood-Schlatter
Image-forming techniques

1. X-ray: plicae cannot be visualized
2. MRI: useful in detection of plicae. MRI-imaging visualization of the presence of medial plicae is possible, but the dynamic behavior of the plicae cannot be visualized
3. CT-arthrography: invasive
4. Ultrasound: (dynamic) ultrasound allows detection of abnormalities of medial plicae in the knee with good sensitivity and specificity.
5. Arthroscopy: golden standard (but invasive)

* Medial Plica Syndrome of the Knee: Diagnosis with Dynamic Sonography Łukasz Paczesny, Jacek Kruczyński
Therapy

1. rest
2. nsaid’s
3. cryotherapy (cooling not freezing! [A.R.V.])
4. iontoforese
5. frictions in case of fibrosis (to mobilise the plica)
6. gedoseerde activiteit
7. steroid injections (next page)
8. operation
Therapy: injection plica mediopatellaris

‘Injection’ with steroid’s in plica mediopatellaris
P: patella; F: femur; arrow’s: needle; *** cartilage medial femurcondyl
The M. articularis genus

‘The articularis genus, vastus medialis, and vastus intermedius have a complex, interacting architecture, suggesting that the articularis genus most likely does not act as an independent muscle. With support of the vastus intermedius and vastus medialis, the articularis genus might be able to function as a retractor of the suprapatellar bursa. The finding of likely interplay between the articularis genus, vastus intermedius, and vastus medialis is supported by their concurrent innervation.’ *

See picture next page

Suprapatellar recess in close relation with the M. articularis genus

suprapatellar recess in close relation with the M. articularis genus (longitudinal)
‘Distally, the articularis genus bundles inserted gradually into the suprapatellar bursa and the joint capsule...’*

‘...the insertion of the vastus medialis expanded from the joint capsule and the patella to the medial edge of the rectus femoris and the aponeurosis of the vastus)...* 

how can a asymptomatic plica become symptomatic?

My assumption is that continuous traction on both the suprapatellar bursa and the joint capsule - in case of squats for example - increases the compression between the mediopatellar plica and the medial femoral condyl. A previously asymptomatic bursa can thereby become inflamed and possibly be responsible for erosive abnormalities on the medial femoral condyl (At Voorhorst).

Ultrasound

1. plica dimensions
2. guided interventions
3. exclusion other causes
4. dynamic investigation
5. color doppler
6. cheep
7. reliable
Role of (dynamic) ultrasound

diagnostic accuracy: 88%
sensitivity: 90%
specificity: 83%

conclusion:
‘dynamic ultrasound allows detection of abnormalities of medial plicae in the knee with good sensitivity and specificity.’ *

* Medial Plica Syndrome of the Knee: Diagnosis with Dynamic Sonography (2009)
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