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Cartilage transplant of the knee

HYDERABAD: A stitch in time saves nine - or in this case, an implant on time improves the quality of life. Among the youth, injuries of the knee joint and wear and tear due to stress often lead to early onset of arthritis. The answer could lie in cartilage cell implantation which prevents further degeneration and restores mobility and agility.

Targeted at patients in 15-45 year age group, the technique of Autologous Chondrocyte Implantation (ACI) received FDA approval in 1997 to treat wear and tear of cartilage due to injury, diseases and middle-age degeneration process.

The first operation in Andhra Pradesh was performed in 2009 by Sai Institute of Sports Injury and Arthroscopy (SISA) which performed a 'relook arthroscopy' for evaluating the results.

Discussing the results of the evaluation, Dr K Raghuveer Reddy, consultant shoulder and knee surgeon said that both the patients who were subjected to the evaluation indicated complete regeneration. Bharat Sai, a 21 year old B.Tech student on who underwent ACI two years ago demonstrated how well he could perform demanding tasks such as squatting, balancing and running post the surgery. The other beneficiary, Prakash, a 27-year-old farmer said that he returned to his normal schedule of work soon after and has been active since. "My life was thrown out of gear and there was severe pain and knocking of knees which wouldn't stop for 1 to 2 hours. Post the implantation, my life seems normal again and I can ride my bike and perform daily tasks with ease," said Bharat who will leave for the US next month to pursue his M.Tech. The procedure for ACI involves biopsy of cartilage from which chondrocytes are isolated and grown for 4 to 6 weeks. The same cells are implanted in the patients through a five centimeter incision which heals over time. While the patient is discharged within a few days of surgery, the post-operative care and physiotherapy take close to a year for complete recovery. The medical procedure costs close to Rs. 2.5 lakh and is also recommended for sports injuries. The surgery however, cannot be performed on people suffering from arthritis or older patients.