

Osteoarthritis of the knee

Information and advice

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This information is designed to supplement the advice given by your doctor, and is written by physiotherapists based on the latest medical advice.

What is osteoarthritis?

Osteoarthritis is an extension of the body's repair process, which takes place in joints that are stressed or injured. Sometimes, but not always, it can cause pain and stiffness. The knee is one of the most commonly affected joints.



X-rays of a normal knee (left) and an arthritic knee (right)



What are the main symptoms of osteoarthritis of the knee?

- Feeling pain – particularly when you're moving your knee or at the end of the day
- Swelling of the knee joint
- Crepitus – a creaking, crunching, grinding sensation when you move the joint
- Stiffness, especially after rest – this usually eases after a minute or so as you get moving
- Weakness of the thigh muscles.

What can you do to help your knee?

There are a number of things that can help ease symptoms and reduce the chances of your arthritis becoming worse:

- **Applying warmth or cold** to your knee can relieve pain and stiffness. Heat lamps, a hot-water bottle or re-heatable pads are effective for warmth. For cold, try an ice pack or a bag of frozen peas wrapped in a damp towel applied to the area for 10-20 minutes. Please do not do this if your skin sensation is impaired. Never apply ice directly to the skin as it can cause burns
- **Medication** can be taken to help ease the pain and inflammation. Ask your GP or local pharmacist for advice

- **Weight management** – being overweight increases the strain on your knees and makes it more likely that your arthritis will get worse over time. Losing even a small amount of weight can make a big difference to the strain on your knees
- **Footwear** – wear sensible well fitting, cushioned shoes to act as shock absorbers. Avoid wearing high heels
- **Walking aids** – consider the use of a walking stick to help reduce the weight and strain on your knee
- **Pace your activities** – don't tackle all the physical jobs at once. Break the harder jobs up into chunks and do something gentler in between
- **Knee support** – some people find it helpful to wear a knee support, but this can also contribute to increased weakness over time
- **Exercises** – done little and often help to keep the knee strong and mobile, such as the ones below:

1. Push your knee into the floor by tightening up your quadricep muscle (the muscle at the front of the thigh)



Hold for five seconds, 10 times.

Repeat one to two times a day.

2. Keeping your knee straight, lift the leg up off the surface and hold for five seconds, five to 10 times.



Repeat one to two times a day.

3. Bend and straighten your knee, aiming to increase the knee bend each time – use your hands to help with this movement initially.

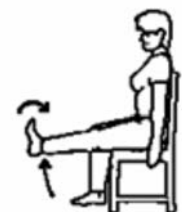


Do this 10 times.

Repeat once a day.

4. Sitting on a chair.

Tighten the thigh muscles and straighten the knee.



Hold for five seconds, 10 times.

Repeat two to three times a day.

If you feel the exercises are making your pain worse, reduce the number or frequency of the exercises or stop and seek advice.

Osteoarthritis affects different people in different ways, but more often it's a slow process that develops over many years. Surgery may be recommended for those who have severe pain or mobility problems, but for others their symptoms remain the same or even get easier.

For more information on knee arthritis, visit:

<http://sdm.rightcare.nhs.uk/pda/osteoarthritis-of-the-knee/>



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