

Osteoarthritis of the Knee

Advice

The cartilage or menisci sit within the knee joint, and act as both a 'spacer' and a 'cushion', their function being to maintain joint space and absorb pressure when the knee is placed under load. Cartilage also covers the ends of the thigh bone and shin bone where they meet and also acts as a 'cushion'. It is normal for cartilage to degenerate both with age and with use, this degeneration is also known as Osteoarthritis (OA.) Although a normal process, it can be very painful and limiting. The symptoms can be improved with physiotherapy, especially aimed at strengthening key muscles around the knee; which act to support the joint as well as making activity modifications and pacing better. It is not uncommon for people to experience a flare up of OA which can result in increased pain stiffness and sometimes joint swelling. Most often this will settle, but can take up to 3 months to do so.

What can I do to help?

Rest: It is usually best to try to carry out your normal activities in small amounts, you mustn't overdo it. You need to take things slowly, pace your activities and avoid movement that makes your pain worse.

Ice: If your knee is swollen and inflamed (warm to the touch) applying an ice pack may be helpful for reducing pain and swelling. A pack of frozen peas wrapped in a tea towel works well as an ice pack. Leave the peas in place for no more than 20 minutes at a time. This can be repeated several times a day.

Pain relief: Simple painkillers (like paracetamol) or non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs, NSAIDS, (like ibuprofen) are available over the counter and can be very effective but don't use them for more than 2 weeks without seeking medical advice. You should carefully read the Patient Information Leaflet that is provided with this medication.

It is advisable to consult your GP or pharmacist before taking additional pain relief if you are currently:

- taking any form of medication
- have any other pre-existing medical conditions
- pregnant

Exercise: Using exercise to maintain healthy movement and good strength of your joints is very important and one of the best ways of managing arthritis. It will not cause your knee joint to worsen, however it is normal to experience a little post exercise discomfort from starting a new type of exercise.

Exercises to try:

Please try each one 10-15 times, 2-3 times a day. Some discomfort is normal as you may be moving muscles which are tight or stiff. Please stop them if they aggravate your pain.

1. Knee Flexion/Extension



Lie on your back with your legs straight.
Bend your knee as far as you can, sliding the heel along the bed/floor then return to start position.

2. Inner range quadriceps



Lie down with a block or pillow underneath the leg you want to strengthen.
Push your knee down into the block or pillow to slowly lift your lower leg off the bed to straighten your knee. Slowly return to start position.

3. Straight leg raise



Lie on your back.
Point your toes up towards you then lift your leg, keeping your knee straight. Slowly bring your leg back down.
If just the weight of your leg is too easy, you can add weight around your ankle with ankle weights or a shopping bag filled with cans of beans tied around your ankle.