

Osteoarthritis of the knee

A patient's guide

Introduction

The knee joint is formed between the thigh bone (femur) and shin bone (tibia). The ends of the bone are covered with cartilage, which reduces friction, promotes smooth movement and acts as a shock absorber. Around the joint is a capsule which contains fluid that lubricates the joint and keeps it healthy. Strong muscles and ligaments keep the joint stable

What is osteoarthritis ?

Osteoarthritis is a very common problem for many people. It is the wear and tear process that occurs in joints with age, most commonly the weight bearing joints. The cartilage becomes thinner and gradually roughens. New bone can form at the edge of the joint (osteophytes), the joint space becomes narrower and increased stress on the joint may

Who gets it?

Anyone can have osteoarthritis as they get older, but you are more likely to get it if:

- you are overweight.
- you are a woman.
- you are over 40 years old.
- It runs in your family.
- you have other joint problems.

Common symptoms include:

- pain - dull/achy
- stiffness - often worst first thing in the morning
- swelling
- creaking/cracking noise
- reduced movement
- changes in the look of the knee
- weak muscles
- localised heat



Stand with your back to the wall. Slowly slide down the wall as far as is comfortable. Hold for five seconds and repeat 5 - 10 times.



Lay on your back and bend then straighten your knee. Repeat 5 - 10 times.



Lie on your back with a rolled up towel or pillow under your knee. Lift your heel off of the bed so your knee is straight. Repeat 5 - 10 times.



Lie on your back. Keep your leg straight and lift off the bed. Hold for the count of five and then lower the leg.



Whilst sitting down, bend and straighten your knee. Repeat 5 - 10 times.

What happens now?

Everybody is different. Some people only have mild symptoms which do not get worse. However, a few people with osteoarthritis may eventually have a knee joint replacement

Treatment options

There is no cure for arthritis but there is much that can be done to reduce your pain and increase how much you are able to do.

Medications

- painkillers, if taken regularly can help reduce pain and allow you to be more active.
- anti-inflammatory drugs which you can buy over the counter or get on prescription from your GP.
- steroid injections, after assessment from a specialist.

Self-help

- you should consider losing weight if you are carrying excess weight exercise such as walking, cycling, swimming or going to the gym
- you can put ice in a damp towel on your knee for 20 minutes
- you can put a hot water bottle on your knee for 15 minutes

Physiotherapy

We use a variety of techniques to help you manage your symptoms, such as walking aids or pain relieving treatments. The best and main form of treatment is exercise.

General advice

- keep mobile, wear cushioned foot wear or insoles
- avoid staying in one position for too long
- if gardening or cleaning, for example, take regular breaks and pace yourself.

Home exercises

Exercise is very important to keep the joint moving. It is important to balance rest and exercise, little and often is the best approach. Exercise improves the health of the joint and increases the blood flow around the joint. They can help with your balance as well.

The following exercises can help strengthen your weak muscles and keep your joint moving. This can help ease the pain and stiffness, increase your physical function and reduce your need for painkillers.