



Knee



Pain

(not caused by accident or injury)

Information and Exercise Leaflet for Patient's and Carers

Knee pain can occur without an accident or injury. Pain can be the result of simple functional activities like getting up from a chair or kneeling, however sometimes there is no clear reason for your knee to hurt. This does not mean that your knees are damaged, and, in most cases, **it is safe to keep moving**.

Why does my knee hurt?

All joints and soft tissues have a certain amount of activity that they can tolerate. This level can go up and down depending on how much activity you do. For example, following a period of rest or illness your activity tolerance will be reduced. If you then do an activity that takes you above this level, you can present with a painful reaction. This is not an indicator of damage, but an indication that you have exceeded your current level of tolerance.

Activities that can cause a painful reaction can include kneeling, squatting, repetitive stairs or ladder climbing, and a general increase in your normal daily activities. Often you may not get a painful reaction at the time of activity, it can come on over the next 24 hours.

Should I be resting or moving?

For the first 24 to 48 hours after a painful reaction:

- Try to rest your knee but avoid long spells of not moving at all.
- Ensure you gently move your knee, aiming to bend and straighten regularly throughout the day.
- If swollen or warm, apply ice (wrapped in a towel) for 10-15mins, every 2-3hours. Ensure to check the skin at regular intervals during this process to prevent ice burns.
- Continue to walk as able.

After 48 hours:

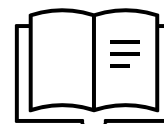
- You should try to use your knee more.
- Do whatever you normally would and stay at or return to work. It is important to return to normal daily function to prevent deconditioning.
- Aim to return to increased activity as you feel comfortable – once pain has improved and you have regained full movement through your knee.
- Gentle exercise really helps to maintain the movement and strength around your knee – suggested exercises can be found further on in this information leaflet.

How do I know if my activities are causing a painful reaction?

It is common to get a painful reaction following increased activity. If this pain is more than 6/10 (with 10 being the worst pain imaginable) or pain lasts for more than 24 hours, check what you have been doing and ease back.

Once this has settled you can start to gradually introduce your activities and exercises again. If you have mild aggravation (pain is less than 6/10) and this settles within 24 hours then keep going with your exercises and gradual return to full activities.

Activity Diary and Modifications



It is sometimes useful to make a note of the daily activities that can potentially aggravate your knee. Below are some of the main aggravating factors and some modifications you can make to help reduce the painful reaction.

Aggravating Factor	Modification
Sleeping with knees touching	Use a pillow between your legs
Prolonged sitting with knees bent	Try to get up and walk every 30 mins
Stairs	- When going upstairs reduce the strain on your knee by leading with your good leg. - When going downstairs reduce the strain on your knee by leading with your problem leg. - Make use of handrails.
Kneeling	Use knee pads or alternate kneeling through one knee at a time with the other leg in front of you. Alternatively, you could make use of a small stool to sit on.
Walking – if painful and causing a limp	Try offloading your knee by using a stick (or elbow crutch) for a short period and remember to pace your activity – take regular breaks if required.
Pivoting (twisting) through the knee	Keep nose and toes facing the same direction when turning.

Should I take painkillers?

Painkillers can help you keep moving. However, it is important to discuss this with your GP, especially if you are taking any other medication.

Should I use ice or a heat pad?

- If you have noticed knee pain within the last two days, it is recommended to use an ice pack for the first 48 hours. You can do this every two to three hours. Make sure you use a damp towel between the ice and the skin to avoid ice burn.
- After two days, you may find that heat is more beneficial. You could use a heat pad or a hot water bottle with an insulated cover on it. Make sure this is not too hot and not directly touching your skin (wrap in a towel). You should apply this for 10 to 15 minutes, three to four times a day.





What about work?

The best thing to do is to keep moving. This may mean that continuing to work, providing your job does not significantly aggravate your symptoms, will be the most beneficial option. However, it would be recommended to discuss any concerns with your employer, as they may be able to support with reduced duties whilst you are recovering.



What about sports?

You should take time before you take part in any sports after a knee problem. You should have no swelling and be able to move your knee properly. You should have full or close to full strength and be able to take your weight through your leg without limping. Remember to stretch and warm up fully before sports.

General Recommendations for Knee Pain:



Exercise

If possible, exercise regularly. This helps to strengthen the muscles around the knee. Aim to walk regularly alongside strength-based activity, which will contribute to overall musculoskeletal health. Other exercise ideas include cycling and swimming.



Weight Management

Increased bodyweight impacts the load placed through our knees. The force transferred through the knee joint during walking ranges between 2-3 times our bodyweight. Even a modest weight loss can make quite a difference in reducing knee pain.



Walking aids

The use of walking aids can be beneficial to help offload a painful knee and thus ease the pain. However, it is important to note that if using a walking aid, to place it in the opposite hand of the affected joint. For example; if your left knee is painful, use the walking aid in the right hand.

Warning Signs

If you have severe pain which is getting worse over several weeks, if you are unwell with back or full leg pain, or under the age of 16 years, you should consult your doctor.

The following symptoms are very rare, but if you suddenly develop any of them, you should consult your doctor immediately.

- Significant swelling to the leg not just the knee
- Feeling generally unwell
- Red, hot and swollen knee
- Signs of infection i.e. night sweats that are out of the ordinary, high temperature and feeling unwell.
- Constant night pain (unable to rest/sleep)
- Unexplained weight loss

If your symptoms fail to improve within 6 weeks with this regime you should contact your doctor for a physiotherapy referral.

What are the aims of physiotherapy?

The focus of physiotherapy is to restore full joint mobility, increase muscle strength and improve overall function. By doing this, it may also improve your pain. We would expect most symptoms to resolve within six-weeks with the recommended management strategies detailed in this leaflet.

However, if symptoms persist, you can be referred into our service for further physiotherapy assessment.

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Exercises

In most cases, it is safe to exercise in the presence of pain. Be mindful of your pain score and if this exceeds 6/10 (with 10 being the worst pain imaginable), then stop the exercises. You may experience a muscle aching sensation during or after exercise which is completely normal and will settle as the body recovers. Below are some exercises designed to help strengthen around the knee joint.



Knee Extensions Sitting with Weights

Sit on a chair. Straighten one leg and tense the thigh muscle. Now bend the knee and relax. If this is easy you can add some ankle weights if you have them.

Perform as many as you can before your legs tire or knee becomes uncomfortable. Rest for 1 minute. Now repeat a further 2-3 times.

Video: <https://youtu.be/51bEgirmVuw>



Supine Bridge Basic

Lie flat on your back, raise your bottom up and off the floor until your legs and body are in a straight line.

Hold 5-10 seconds. Repeat as many as you can before your legs tire or knee becomes uncomfortable. Rest for 1 minute. Now repeat a further 2-3 times.

Video: http://youtu.be/fK_xUE3OKIE



Gastrocnemius Stretch - Single Leg

Place one foot forward and one foot behind you. Both feet should be pointing forwards and both heels should remain on the floor. Keep your back knee straight, now bend the front knee. You should feel a stretch in your back leg, remember don't let your heel come off the floor. If you don't feel a stretch, move your legs slightly further away from one another.

Hold for 30 seconds, repeat x 3 on each side x 3 times per day

Video: <https://youtu.be/EFnLIHNBQQ>

Sit-Down Chair Squat



Stand up and sit down from a chair in a slow and controlled manner. At first, this may be more comfortable if you perform it from a higher chair / stool.

Perform as many as you can before your legs tire or knee becomes uncomfortable. Rest for 1 minute. Now repeat a further 2-3 times.

Video: <https://youtu.be/Z20XNb0VdEk>

Lunge



This is a more challenging exercise. Make sure you are comfortable with the previous exercises before attempting this.

Take a step forwards and lunge. Remember not to let the heel of your front foot lift off the floor.

At first perform only a small lunge. Once you get used to the small lunge, you can then progress by performing a deeper lunge (getting your back knee closer to the floor like in the image)

Perform as many as you can before your legs tire or knee becomes uncomfortable. Rest for 1 minute. Now repeat a further 2-3 times.

Video: <http://youtu.be/xASFze7P-Fs>

Step Front Supported



This is a more challenging exercise. Progress to this once you have found the previous exercises manageable.

Step up and down onto a step and remember to change which leg you lead with.

Perform as many as you can before your legs tire or knee becomes uncomfortable. Rest for 1 minute. Now repeat a further 2-3 times.

Video: <http://youtu.be/EI739ijbGUU>

What actions can I take to improve my health?

Evidence tells us that making healthy lifestyle choices can have a big impact on influencing problems with your muscles and bones and can play a major role in your overall health. Some of the most effective areas to address are below: (click on the links)

Maintaining a healthy weight

Link: www.nhs.uk/live-well/healthy-weight/



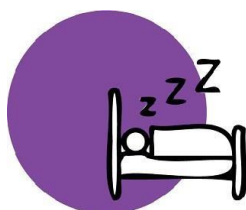
Increasing levels of physical activity

Link: www.nhs.uk/live-well/exercise/



Avoiding poor sleep patterns

Link: www.nhs.uk/live-well/sleep-and-tiredness/how-to-get-to-sleep/



Reducing alcohol consumption

Link: www.nhs.uk/live-well/alcohol-support/calculating-alcohol-units/



Stopping smoking

Link: www.nhs.uk/live-well/quit-smoking/



Maintaining a healthy mind

Link: www.nhs.uk/conditions/stress-anxiety-depression/



The **good news** is that you are able to influence lots of these by modifying your lifestyle. Therefore it is important that you consider addressing these areas alongside your current treatment.

You may wish to discuss any of these factors with your treating clinician who will be able to work with you and guide your long term management and support you to improve your wellbeing.

There will be information about the local services that exist within the waiting areas of the physiotherapy department and your treating clinician will be able to help signpost you to appropriate services.

The websites listed below give more information on local services available:

- Blackburn and Darwen - <https://refreshbwd.com/>
- East Lancashire - <http://www.upandactive.co.uk/>
- Public Health England <https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/public-health-england>