

Leaflet 6 Osteoarthritis of the Knee

This condition involves the gradual roughening of the cartilage covering the ends of the bones making up the knee joint, caused by wear and tear.

It is associated with changes in the underlying bone, which may ultimately cause pain and impaired function.

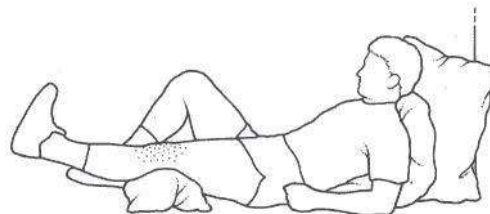
This condition does not follow the same course in everybody and there are certain things you can do to help yourself and prevent problems in the future.

1. Osteoarthritis tends to affect weight-bearing joints therefore:
 - a) Avoid becoming overweight as this can lead to increasing stress on the joints and increased pain. If overweight, then losing weight can help.
 - b) Avoid, where possible, carrying heavy loads. Balance loads between both hands and decrease the loads by increasing the number of journeys.
2. Avoid sitting for prolonged periods of time as this can cause stiffness. Try to get up and walk around or alter your position regularly, i.e. every 20 to 30 minutes. Remain as active as you can. This will also help with any weight loss.
Activities: Swimming is good – be careful with breaststroke as some knees do not like the twisting action
Cycling can also be helpful – it is important to have the saddle correctly adjusted (not too low) and avoid lots of hills.
3. If your joints become swollen, ice-packs may help to reduce the swelling and pain. Apply crushed ice or frozen peas in a damp towel for 10-15 minutes. Leave off for at least 15 minutes before re-applying.
4. Heat may also be helpful. You could use a wheat pack or a hot water bottle (make sure it has a cover).
5. Your GP may be able to offer help in the form of painkillers (analgesics) and/or anti-inflammatory medication that will help to alleviate the symptoms and allow you to be more active.

Exercises

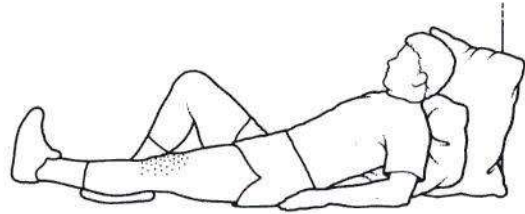
Exercise can be very useful in keeping the muscles as strong as possible and helping to support the joint. You may find the following exercises useful. If possible, they should be performed twice a day.

1. Use cushion or rolled up towel under knee. Pull foot up, brace knee and raise heel to straighten knee. Hold for 5 seconds. Slowly lower.

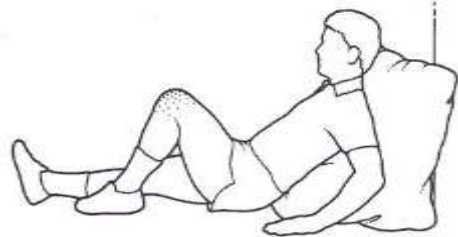


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2. Pull foot up and brace thigh to straighten knee. Raise heel, lift leg slowly off ground keeping it straight. Hold for 5 seconds. Slowly lower.



3. Do this exercise with your foot on a melamine tray (with a towel under your heel) or on the sheet of your bed. Bend and straighten your hip and knee by sliding your foot up and down the board.



4. Sit on a chair. Pull your toes up, tighten your thigh muscles and straighten your knee. Hold for approximately 5 seconds, then lower your leg and relax.



5. Sitting with your arms crossed, or out in front of you. Slowly lean forward and stand up. Then slowly sit down. You may need to use your arms to help at first. Try not to drop into the chair. The lower the chair, the more difficult the exercise.

