

Osteoarthritis (O.A.) and your knee

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Other formats

If you need this information in another format such as audio tape or computer disk, Braille, large print, high contrast, British Sign Language or translated into another language, please telephone the PALS desk on 01271 314090.

What is osteoarthritis (O.A.)?

Osteoarthritis refers to joint pain with varying degrees of functional limitation and effect on quality of life. It is a common condition which can develop over time, but not in all cases.

Who can get O.A.?

Anyone can develop O.A. The larger weight-bearing joints are most commonly affected – hips and knees. It develops in previously healthy joints, normally in people over 45. It can also develop in younger people after a fracture or similar injury.

It is twice as common in women as men, and most likely in people who are overweight or who suffer from high blood pressure.

What are the symptoms?

- Pain, stiffness and restriction of movement in the knee, often worse first thing in the morning, but 'loosening up' after a half hour or so.
- Swelling and inflammation (localised heat).
- The knee tends to look a little larger than normal.
- Poor mobility – eg. The loss of ability to climb stairs or walk any distance.
- Sometimes the knee seems to give way.
- You may notice some crackling or creaking within the joint.

What is the outlook (prognosis)?

The rate of increase varies greatly between patients, and also in individual patients at different times. Progression from mild to moderate O.A. to severe O.A. is uncommon, and only a few people need replacement surgery.

In many older people, O.A. is mild, doesn't become worse and does not make them any less able than would be expected at their age.

What can I do to help myself?

Exercise regularly to strengthen the muscles around the knee, and to maintain movement. Here is a set of exercises for you to try which can be very beneficial:



Lying on your back with your legs straight.

Bend your ankles up and push your knees down firmly against the bed as far as you can. Hold for 10 seconds – relax.

Repeat 10 times.



Lying on your back with one leg bent.

Pull the toes up of your straight leg and push your knee into the bed. Lift the leg 10cm off the bed, keeping the knee straight. Hold approx 10 seconds – slowly lower it back to the bed.

Repeat 10 times.



Lying on your back.

Bend and straighten your leg **AS FAR AS YOU CAN.**

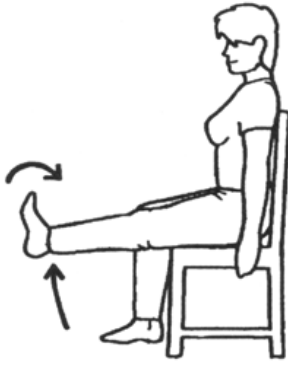
Repeat 20 times.



Sitting.

Bend your knee as much as possible using the other leg to help push the affected leg back. Hold for 5-10 seconds and relax.

Repeat 10 times.



Sit on a chair.

Pull your toes up towards you and straighten your knee. Hold for 5-10 seconds and then slowly lower your leg back to the floor.

Repeat 10 times.



Sitting with your arms crossed.

Stand up pushing your feet firmly onto the floor and squeezing your buttocks as you go. Then sit down slowly and repeat. (This can be made easier or more difficult by changing the height of the chair. A lower chair is more difficult).

Repeat 10 times.



Stand in front of a 20 – 40cm step.

Step up, pushing your foot firmly onto the step and squeezing your buttocks as you go. Repeat **10 times** with one leg leading and then repeat with the other leg leading.

Remember

Exercises should not cause muscle strain or excessive fatigue, and should be increased slowly. Feeling a stretch or ache is good, as it shows the muscles are working. The exercises should be done gently, slowly and ideally little and often, **2-3 times a day** and to get the most benefit, keep doing the exercises. They must not make you worse. If they do, check that you are doing them correctly. If it is still painful, reduce the number of repetitions, or stop for a day or two.

- Many people find a regular walk helpful, as it helps to give protection against ongoing disease and disability. Swimming can also help.
- Use a walking stick or walking poles – held in the hand opposite the affected knee. This can help minimize the stress on the knees.

- Try to lose any excess weight, as this can add to the burden on the joints. Research has shown that losing weight reducing symptoms. More information on how to do this can be found from the British Heart Foundation.
- Wearing supportive and cushioned- soled shoes, (e.g. good quality trainers) or cushioned insoles can greatly reduce the impact of walking, and minimize jarring of the knee joints.
- Try to vary your activities, punctuated with periods of rest, and do not stay in any one position for longer than 30 minutes to reduce the feeling of stiffness.
- To ease the symptoms try either of the following:

Ice: Use a bag of frozen peas, straight from the freezer. Wrap in a damp cloth, and apply to the knee for 10-15 minutes.

Warmth: Use a hot water bottle, or a pack heated in the microwave, wrapped in a towel. Apply to the knee for 20 minutes.

You can do both / either of these treatments 3 or 4 times daily if needed. The temperature should be pleasantly warm / cold, not burning.

The skin should remain pink. If you have diabetes, poor circulation or fragile skin, seek advice from a medical professional.

Will medication or creams help?

There are different medicines which can help such as paracetamol and non-steroidal anti-inflammatories. Also anti-inflammatory creams/gels can be of use. Please discuss this with your GP. Corticosteroid injections into the joint can be helpful for people with moderate to severe pain.

Will I need surgery?

Most people with an O.A. knee joint do not have it badly enough to need surgery. Some people may need replacement surgery, which has a high rate of success, but like all operations, carries some risk.

If you do need surgery, doing the above exercises can help the outcome after the operation.

Further information

If you have any questions or concerns, please contact your local Physiotherapy Department, contactable via North Devon District Hospital on **01271 322577**.

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PALS

The Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) ensures that the NHS listens to patients, relatives, carers and friends, answers questions and resolves concerns as quickly as possible. If you have a query or concern call 01271 314090 or email ndht.pals@nhs.net. You can also visit the PALS and Information Centre in person at North Devon District Hospital, Barnstaple.

Have your say

Northern Devon Healthcare NHS Trust aims to provide high quality services. However, please tell us when something could be improved. If you have a comment or compliment about a service or treatment, please raise your comments with a member of staff or the PALS team in the first instance.

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