

Knee Arthritis – tips and exercises

Knee arthritis is a breakdown of the cartilage that cushions your knee joints. Many people develop arthritis in their knees as they age.

What will you feel?

You may feel aching, pain, and stiffness. Your knee may feel like it locks or catches and you may feel or hear clicking and grinding. Symptoms are usually worse in the morning, after long periods of not moving or after prolonged activities. Symptoms can vary from day to day.

You may have difficulty walking, squatting, climbing stairs, getting in and out of the car or putting your shoes and socks on.

What should you do?

Move your knee often: Arthritic joints feel better with gentle movements and worse with long periods of not moving. If you have been sitting for a while, bend and straighten your knee several times before you get up.

Maintain ideal body weight: Being overweight puts extra strain on your knees.

Walking aid: Walking with a limp can put extra strain on your body.

Use a cane, walking stick or walker to help you walk with less pain and without a limp.

Supportive shoes: Good cushioning and arch support can make standing and walking more comfortable. Avoid high heels and non-supportive shoes.

Heat or Cold: Place heat or cold packs on your knees for 10-15 minutes as needed to help manage your pain. Place a thin layer of cloth between the ice or heat and your skin. You can alternate back and forth between heat and cold.

Sitting: Sit in a chair that allows you to have your hips higher than your knees and scoot to the edge of the chair before you stand. Use the arm rest, if available, to help push yourself up. Avoid sitting in low chairs, soft couches or on a low toilet. This is stressful on your knees and will make it difficult to get up. It may also be helpful to get a raised toilet seat.

Sleep: Use a pillow between your legs when you sleep on your side or under your knees when you sleep on your back.



Exercise: Exercise can help you maintain your range of motion, decrease your pain and maintain your activity level.

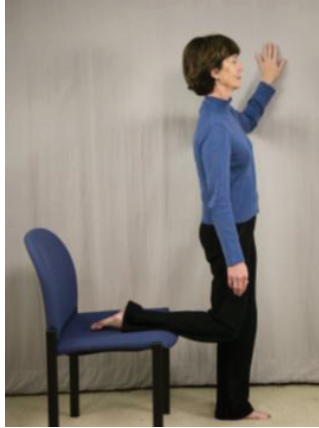
Aerobic exercise: It is important to continue with regular aerobic exercise. Aerobic exercise like riding a bike, using a pedal exerciser, swimming, or water exercises are good for your knee. Make a goal of 30 minutes of aerobic exercise per day. Stop if the exercise is causing more pain.

Stretching exercises

These exercises will help maintain range of motion in your knee and flexibility in your muscles. Repeat these exercises 3-4 times per day.

Front of thigh stretch:

Stand next to a wall or counter for balance. Place your foot on a chair behind you. Gently tighten your buttocks and feel the stretch on the front of the thigh. Hold for 60 seconds.



Knee bending:

Bend your affected knee as far as tolerated. Straighten it back out and repeat 10 times every hour that you sit.

Hamstring – back of thigh stretch:

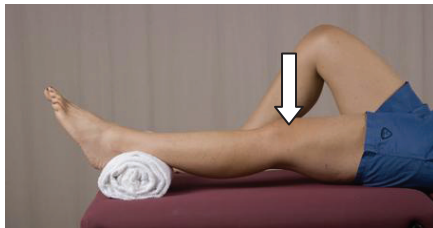
Lie on your back with your knees bent. Place a strap or your hands behind the leg you want to stretch. Straighten your knee until you feel a stretch in the back of your thigh. Hold for 60 seconds.



Knee

straightening:

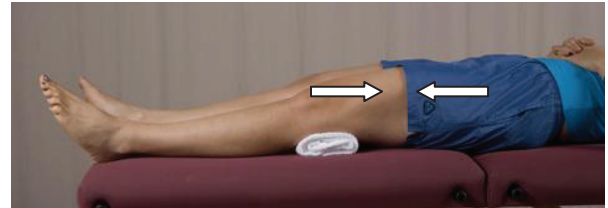
Place a large enough towel roll under your ankle so that your calf clears the bed. Allow your knee to straighten. Maintain this position for 2-10 minutes every 2 hours.



Strengthening Exercises

Strengthening exercises will help you return to your normal activities with less pain.

Quadriceps set: Place a small towel roll under your knee. Straighten your knee by tightening your thigh muscles. Press the back of your knee into the towel and hold for 5-10 seconds. Repeat 10-20 times, 3-4 times per day. This may also be done sitting.



Short arc knee extension: Lie on your back with a towel roll under your knee. Tighten your thigh muscles and lift your heel off the ground. Keep your knee on the towel roll as you hold your leg as straight as possible for 5 seconds. Do 10-20 repetitions 3-4 times per day.



Consult with your physical therapist or doctor if you experience an increase in your symptoms with recommended exercises, or if you develop new symptoms of numbness, tingling, or a spread of the pain. This information is not intended to diagnose health problems or to take the place of medical advice or care you receive from your physician or other health care professional. If you have persistent health problems, or if you have additional questions, please consult with your doctor. If you have questions or need more information about your medication, please speak to your pharmacist. Kaiser Permanente does not endorse the medications or products mentioned. Any trade names listed are for easy identification only.