



West Berkshire Physiotherapy Service Leaflet 11 Osteoarthritis of the Knee

Osteoarthritis (OA) is the wear and tear process that occurs in joints, to varying degrees. It most commonly occurs in weight bearing joints such as the knee. The condition involves the gradual roughening of the cartilage covering the ends of the bones making up the knee joint. It is associated with changes in the underlying bone, which may cause pain and stiffness. It can be seen on x-ray, but research suggests that the level of pain experienced and degrees of wear on x-ray do not correlate. The condition does not follow the same course in everyone and there are certain things you can do to help to reduce problems in the future.

Self Help and Management

1. Osteoarthritis tends to affect weight-bearing joints therefore:
 - a) **Keep your weight at a healthy limit.** Being overweight 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. **Keep mobile** and 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:

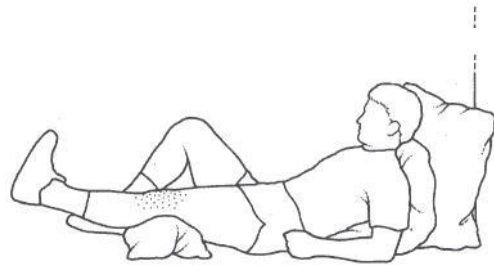
- Swimming is good – be careful with breaststroke as some knees do not like the twisting action
 - Cycling can also be helpful – it is important to have the saddle correctly adjusted (not too low) and avoid lots of hills.
 - Walking (sticks and poles are sometimes useful for support)
3. **Iceing:** If your joints become swollen, ice-packs may help. Apply crushed ice or frozen peas in a damp towel for 20 minutes once a day.
 4. **Heat:** may also be helpful. You could use a wheat pack or a hot water bottle (make sure it has a cover).
 5. **Pain relief:** Your GP may be able to offer help in the form of painkillers (analgesics) and/or anti-inflammatory medication that may help to reduce the symptoms and allow you to be more active

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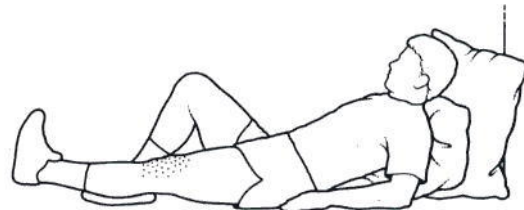
Exercises

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.

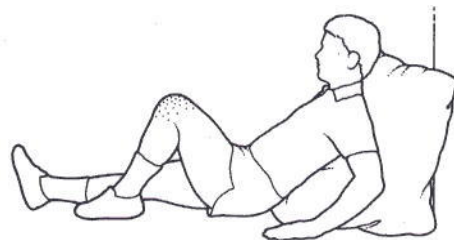
1. Use cushion or rolled up towel under knee. Pull foot up, brace knee and raise heel to straighten knee. Hold for 5 seconds. Slowly lower.



2. Pull foot up and brace thigh to straighten knee. Raise heel, lift leg slowly off ground keeping it straight. Hold for 5 seconds, 10 repetitions. Slowly lower.

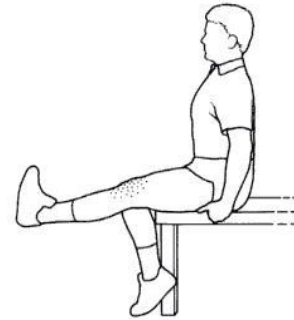


3. Do this exercise with your foot on a tray (with a towel under your heel) or on the sheet of your bed. Bend and straighten your hip and knee by sliding your foot up and down the board.



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4. Sit on a chair. Pull your toes up, tighten your thigh muscles and straighten your knee. Hold for approximately 5 seconds, 10 repetitions, then lower your leg and relax.



5. Sit 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. Repeat 10 times.



Please note: During the above exercises you should not push into pain but mild discomfort is acceptable. As is usual with any new exercise, your muscles may ache for a few days, these should settle. If they do not, try to find out the aggravating exercise and leave this out for a few days then try again later. Should the problems persist please contact your GP or physiotherapist.



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