

Knee Pain

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How does the knee work?

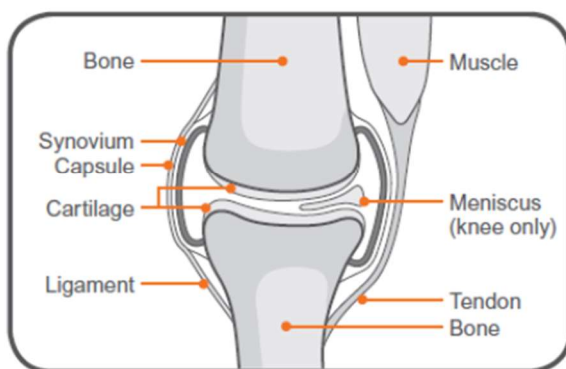
The knee joint is where the thigh and shin bones meet. The end of each bone is covered with cartilage, which allows the ends of the bones to move against each other almost without friction. The knee joint has two extra pieces of cartilage called menisci, which spread the load more evenly across the knee.

The knee joint is held in place by four large ligaments. These are thick, strong bands which run within or just outside the joint capsule. Together with the capsule, the ligaments prevent the bones moving in the wrong directions or dislocating. The thigh muscles (quadriceps) also help to hold the knee joint in place.

What causes knee pain?

There are many different causes of knee pain. A common cause is osteoarthritis, a condition that affects the body's joints. The surfaces within the joint are damaged so the joint doesn't move as smoothly as it should. Your doctor will be able to tell you what

A normal knee joint



has caused your pain, but the information and exercises here will be relevant for most cases.

What can be done to help?

Medication

There are a number of different tablets and creams available. Painkillers such as paracetamol and ibuprofen may help and you should use them if you need to. It's important that you take them regularly and at the recommended dose to help you control the pain and allow you to continue exercising. Don't wait until your pain is severe before taking painkillers.

You shouldn't take ibuprofen or aspirin if you're pregnant or have asthma, indigestion or an ulcer until you've spoken to your doctor or pharmacist. Medication can have side-effects so you should read the label carefully and check with your pharmacist if you have any queries.

If over-the-counter medication doesn't work, your doctor may prescribe stronger painkillers or capsaicin cream, which you can rub directly onto the knee.

Physiotherapy

If your knee pain is affecting your activity and is persisting, ask your GP about referral to a physiotherapist. Physiotherapy can help you to manage pain and improve your strength and flexibility. A physiotherapist can provide a variety of treatments, help you understand your problem and get you back to your normal activities.

Surgery

Surgery may be recommended if your pain is very severe or you have mobility problems. Your doctor will discuss with you what the surgery may involve.

What can I do to help myself?

- lose weight (if you're overweight)
- exercise – low-impact activities such as swimming, cycling and using a cross-trainer are particularly good.