

Managing osteoarthritis of the knee



Osteoarthritis is a chronic condition that often affects the knee, causing pain, stiffness, swelling and difficulty doing the things you need and like to do.

The risk of developing osteoarthritis increases as you get older. You have increased risk of developing knee osteoarthritis if you are female, if you've had a previous knee injury or if you are above a healthy weight.

Your knee pain is likely to be caused by osteoarthritis if you are over 45, your knee feels stiff first thing in the morning or after rest, and your pain gets worse with activity. Research shows you can reduce your knee symptoms with exercise, weight management and other lifestyle changes.

Do I need a scan?

In most cases, no scan is needed. Your healthcare provider can diagnose knee osteoarthritis by examining your knee and discussing your symptoms.

If imaging is required, an X-ray is usually enough. MRI, CT and ultrasound scans do not provide extra useful information, can cause unnecessary worry, and do not change recommended treatment.

What can help?

1. Exercise

Exercise, combined with weight management and education, is the first and best option to manage knee osteoarthritis. Safe and recommended activities include walking, cycling, water-based

exercise, and strengthening exercises for the legs and knees. For more guidance on exercising your knee, use the links at the end of this fact sheet.

Some discomfort during activity is normal and does not mean you're causing harm. Your healthcare provider can help you choose the right type and amount of exercise and advise whether medicines before or after activity may help.

2. Weight management

If you're above a healthy weight, even small amounts of weight loss can reduce pain and make daily activities easier.

3. Self-management and support

Your healthcare provider can give you reliable information about knee osteoarthritis, help you use aids such as walking sticks if needed, and teach you how to pace activities to reduce flare-ups. They can also work with you to set goals and develop a personalised management plan.

Your progress should be reviewed regularly so your plan can be adjusted, and if your symptoms persist or worsen, a referral to a specialist or another service may be needed.

What about surgery?

Nine out of ten people with knee osteoarthritis can manage their symptoms without surgery. Arthroscopy (keyhole surgery to wash out the joint or remove damaged tissue) is not recommended for people with uncomplicated knee osteoarthritis. Knee replacement surgery should only be considered when exercise, education and weight

management no longer manage your symptoms effectively. If surgery becomes necessary, staying active and working on strength beforehand can improve recovery.

Support and resources

If knee pain is bothering you, here are some things you can do:

- Speak to your healthcare provider for referral to the appropriate clinician or service including exercise professional, hydrotherapy, dietitian or weight management program.
- The [Get Healthy Service](#) is a free telephone coaching program to help with health goals such as improving physical activity and nutrition. Join by calling 1300 806 258 or ask your healthcare provider to refer you.
- Read the [Osteoarthritis of the Knee Clinical Care Standard](#). The standard describes best practice care for knee osteoarthritis and contains information and resources for consumers, clinicians and health services.
- Check out the following online resources:
 - <https://mykneeexercise.org.au>
 - <http://movingwitharthritis.org.au>
 - <http://arthritisaustralia.com.au/managing-arthritis/living-with-arthritis/healthy-eating>
 - <http://aci.health.nsw.gov.au/chronic-pain/for-everyone>
 - <http://arthritisaustralia.com.au/managing-arthritis/staying-moving-staying-strong>

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