

Integrated Musculoskeletal Service
Physiotherapy department

Anterior Knee Pain

Information and Exercise Leaflet for Patient's and Carers

What is Anterior Knee pain? (Front of the knee pain)

Pain localised around the front of the knee is very common. Problems are normally caused by repetitive movements of the knee during your normal daily activities. This combined with general weakness to the muscles on the front of your thigh can lead to pain. The problems can be resolved by changing the repetitive load on the knee over a short period, and strengthening of the thigh muscles. It will usually settle within 6-12 weeks from starting treatment. The main factors for maintaining good healthy knees, is regular strength and cardio-vascular exercise 30 minutes daily.

Should I be resting or moving?

For the first 24 to 48 hours

- Try to rest your knee but avoid long spells of not moving at all.
- Try to move your knee gently for 10 to 20 seconds every hour when you are awake.
- If swollen or warm then use a wet towel over your knee followed by an ice bag / frozen peas for 10-15 minutes every 2 hours.

After 48 hours

- You should try to use your knee more.
- Do whatever you normally would and stay at or return to work. This is important and is the best way to get better.
- Avoid sports or heavy lifting until you have less discomfort and good movement.
- When going upstairs reduce the strain on your knee by leading with your good leg. If there is a handrail, use it.
- When going downstairs reduce the strain on your knee by leading with your problem leg. If there is a handrail, use it.
- Gentle exercise really helps your knee and can relieve pain.

Should I take painkillers?

- Painkillers can help you keep moving. However, it is important to discuss this with your GP, especially if you are taking any other medication

Should I use ice or a heat pad?

If you have had an injury or a flare-up of an old problem in the last two days, wrap crushed ice in a damp towel and hold it for five to ten minutes against the part of your hip that hurts. You can do this every two to three hours. Make sure you use a damp towel between the ice and the skin to avoid ice burn.

Alternatively, you could try sports sprays and gel packs, which do a similar job.

After two days, you may find that heat is more relaxing. You could use a heat pad or a hot water bottle with an insulated cover on it. Make sure this is not too hot and not directly touching your skin. You should do this for 10 to 15 minutes, three to four times a day. You can also continue with ice to help reduce the pain and further swelling.

What about work?

You will recover faster and everybody will benefit if you can stay at or get back to work as early as possible. Do not worry if your knee still hurts, as you may only have to do light work at first. Try to stay active and remember to keep moving. Speak to your manager about any concerns you may have.

What about sports?

You should take time before you take part in any sports after a knee problem. If you take part in sports too soon you could be injured again. You should have no swelling and be able to move your knee properly. You should have full or close to full strength and be able to take your weight through your leg without limping. Remember to stretch and warm up fully before sports.

Warning Signs

If you have severe pain which is getting worse over several weeks, if you are unwell with back or full leg pain, or under the age of 16 years, you should consult your doctor.

The following symptoms are very rare, but if you suddenly develop any of them, you should consult your doctor straightaway.

- Significant swelling to the leg not just the knee
- Feeling generally unwell
- Signs of infection i.e. night sweats that are out of the ordinary, high temperature and feeling unwell.
- Constant night pain (unable to rest/sleep)
- Unexplained weight loss

If your symptoms fail to improve within 6 weeks with this regime you should contact your doctor for a physiotherapy referral. If this is the case remember to bring a pair of shorts to change in to, this will help the physiotherapist diagnose your problem.

Anterior Knee Pain Exercises

Exercise 1

- Tighten your thigh for 5-10 seconds against the bed, making sure your thigh muscles are working hard
- Knees should be straight and 1st toes pointing upwards
- 5-15 repetitions



Exercise 2

- Tighten your thigh muscle and lift your leg off the bed approx. 10-15cm, making sure you point your toes upwards. Hold for 5 seconds and slowly relax down
- 5-15 repetitions



Exercise 3

- Tighten your thigh muscle and lift your leg away from the bed, till fully straight. Hold for 5 seconds and slowly relax down.
- 5-15 repetitions



Exercise 4

- Seated push heels into floor
- In sitting push your heel down into the floor, tightening the thigh muscle. Hold for 5 plus seconds and relax.
- 5-15 Repetitions



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