

Alleviate that nagging pain without medication!

# 8 Tips to Help You Help Yourself with your **KNEE INJURY**



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## Foreword:

A knee injury can really put a limp in your day. It is one of the most common joints we injure so being able to help yourself get on track to getting that knee better ASAP would be so useful, wouldn't it? Of course you will need to see your Physical Therapist at some point if your knee doesn't get better, but in the meantime, why not try the suggestions below to get that knee hopping again?!

# 8 Tips to Help You Help Yourself With Your Knee Injury

**Logically**, treatment of your knee injury depends on exactly what is causing the injury! As mentioned above, your best bet is to get to your Physical Therapist at Physical Therapy NOW so they can properly diagnose exactly what is causing your knee problem and then set you on the right path with the most effective treatment.

*Some knee injuries or pain might not simply be a result of a new, sudden injury, but rather from years of bad posturing, poor alignment, or other long-term issues. Until you see your Physical Therapist to figure out where your particular pain is coming from, however, there are a few things you can do to get your knee started on its path to being pain-free no matter what injury you have:*

## 1) Rest

Rest! This is one of the most important things you can do for your knee, particularly if you don't know what is causing your knee pain. Rest, you say? Who has time to rest? Resting the knee doesn't necessarily mean sitting around doing nothing at all. Rest means to decrease the activities that you have normally been doing or at least the ones that you know flare-up your knee pain. Resting your knee does a couple of things: Firstly, it stops the irritation on your knee and gives it a little time to heal. Secondly, it provides some important information about what your knee symptoms do even when you aren't using the knee that much. This key information can help your Physical Therapist determine the ultimate cause of your knee pain.

## 2) Ice

Brrrrrr! This is not everyone's favorite treatment but if you have just injured your knee, applying ice to your joint is essential to cut down on any unnecessary swelling and secondary injury to the tissues surrounding the main injury. If your injury occurred more than a few days ago, icing can still be extremely useful for the same purpose. But ice is so cold, you say! What about heat, you ask? If the injury has occurred a few weeks back or is long-standing, you can also try using heat on your knee and see if that helps to decrease your pain and/or the local swelling.

## 3) Compression

That's a wrap! Compressing an injured area is emerging in current research as one of the most important things one can do for an injury, particularly a knee injury that has just occurred. Compressing the knee straight after an injury with a wrap or form fitting slip-on brace can limit any excess swelling in the knee. Remember some swelling of an injury is required for the healing process but excess swelling can damage surrounding cells and inhibit the local muscles from working well. Feel too tight? No problem, if the knee gets more painful once you wrap it or if it feels too constricted, just remove the wrap and rewrap it a bit looser.

## 4) Elevation

Up, up and away! Elevating your knee helps to **encourage draining** of the swelling around your joint. It is best to elevate your knee above your heart to help gravity move the swelling back towards your heart so it can re-circulate the fluid into your system. Does it sound like a complicated circus move to get your knee above your heart? It's really not that difficult but can make a world of difference to how quickly your knee recovers. For instance, you could lie on the couch and stack pillows up to put your leg on, or lie on the floor and put your leg up on the couch.

When your knee is not elevated, gravity pulls the swelling down into your limb and your body has to rely only on the pumping action of your muscles to get the fluid out. Because you wouldn't be 'pumping' your muscles as much due to your knee pain, the process takes much longer than if you can elevate it above your heart.

## 5) Stop checking and re-checking!

It's tempting, we know, but avoid 'testing' your knee by continually checking/confirming if something hurts. Each time you irritate your knee, you may be causing further damage.

## 6) Maybe some drugs?

If you are open to taking medication, call your pharmacist to see if there are any over the counter medications for pain or swelling you could take, as both symptoms can hinder recovery of your knee. Explain to the pharmacist the nature of your injury, including when it occurred, how much swelling there is, and how much pain you are in. Obviously your doctor can also advise you on medication but sometimes it takes a bit longer to get an appointment to see them so in the meantime, your local pharmacist will be happy to give some general advice to get you started.

## 7) Strengthen:

But it seems so early to start strengthening the muscles, you say? By starting to contract the muscle supporting the knee joint you help to both keep the muscle strong and also pump any excess fluid out of the knee. Start working your supporting knee muscles only if you can do so without pain. It only takes a teaspoon of extra fluid (swelling) in your knee joint to affect how well your thigh muscle (quadriceps) works. **Given that** the quadriceps is the main supporting muscle of the knee, we want all the help we can get when the knee is injured!

***Try this:** Sit on the couch or floor with your knee straight out in front of you. Tighten your thigh muscle so that the back of your knee pushes down towards the couch or floor, and so that your heel raises up slightly. Hold this position for 10 seconds and repeat 10x. Do this 2-3X per day but remember only do it if it causes no pain. If part of your problem is that your knee can't straighten, try the same exercise with a pillow or towel roll under the knee.*

## 8) Get some professional advice!

Quick! Get to your Physical Therapist at Physical Therapy NOW as soon as possible. Our Physical Therapists are well trained in diagnosing and treating knee injuries. They can put your knee through the appropriate testing to find out for sure what is causing your pain. **If appropriate**, they will also send you on the right path for any necessary tests such as an x-ray or magnetic resonance image (MRI) to **help rule out the need for more medical intervention or care**. Your Physical Therapist is the best person to advise you on the most appropriate exercises for you to do for your injured knee, and which things to avoid in order to get the quickest recovery possible.

# Extra, Extra! Read All About It!

## *Added information about your knee injury... What Could Be Causing It?*

So you have managed to get your knee injury started on the track to recovery... well done! Now wouldn't it be nice to know what **most likely** is/was causing that terrible discomfort? Of course you will have to visit your Physical Therapist to confirm your suspicions, but the most common causes of knee pain are listed below. Have a read and see if you can match your symptoms up!

### 1) Patellofemoral Pain

“Movie-goers’ pain”. This is the colloquial term for patellofemoral pain. Not a movie buff? Well you can still develop this type of pain even without a taste for the big screen! Patellofemoral pain is one of the most common causes of knee pain. It is particularly common in adolescents but can occur in any age group. The pain is felt under or behind the kneecap (patella); it is difficult to put your finger on the pain as it often just feels like it is all around the kneecap itself. There isn't usually any swelling that you will notice and there doesn't need to be one single accident or injury that causes this type of knee pain, it may just come on over time. That being said, a fall onto your knee(s), a motor vehicle accident where your knees slam into the dashboard, or a direct hit onto the knee are sure culprits to cause patellofemoral pain. Advanced knee pain of this type might cause your knees to creak or grind when you bend them and will be painful going up and especially down stairs. Kneeling on your knees will be painful, as will sitting for a long period (like when watching a movie, hence the name!)

### 2) Ligament Tear

Ouch! That sounds painful, and it is! Another common injury in the knee is a ligament tear (sprain). There are many ligaments in the knee that help to keep the bones together and in alignment. To sprain a ligament you will have to have endured a forceful movement on the knee (hence the pain!), which comes on immediately. The most common ligaments to be injured are the medial collateral and the lateral collateral ligaments (MCL & LCL), which are on the inside and outside of your knee, respectively. The anterior cruciate ligament and the posterior cruciate ligaments (ACL & PCL) are right inside your knee and are also commonly injured with more forceful accidents.

When you injure the MCL or LCL you can touch a painful area on the inside or outside of your knee, respectively. When you injure your ACL or PCL the pain area is not so precise and the whole knee feels sore and may be swollen. The ACL sometimes makes a popping sound when torn fully so if you heard that when you injured your knee you can almost be sure you have torn this important ligament! Depending on how hard the force on your knee was will determine how badly you have sprained your ligament(s). You may have just torn a few fibers of the ligament or you may have completely torn it in two! A feeling of the knee being unsteady when you put weight on that side is another **common** sign of a ligament injury, **though this can happen with a swollen joint too**. This is a common injury for professional athletes, so if you have torn a ligament, consider yourself up there in super star world!

### 3) Meniscal Tear

What the heck are the menisci, you ask? These small disc-like structures (two in each knee) sit between the thighbone and the **lower** leg bone and help to provide some shock absorption in the joint. The menisci in the knee are prone to injury and can be injured in a single accident or can incur injury over time. The pain may be difficult to put your finger on but it is sometimes felt along the middle or outside of your knee in one particular spot. When your meniscus is injured it makes it difficult to fully squat down or to twist the knee. You might feel more comfortable walking with a bit of a bend in your knee. Although keeping your knee bent protects the injured meniscus, it is terrible for your knee joint! An injured meniscus may cause some clicking inside the knee when you use it, like something is getting caught with each movement. The tricky thing about some meniscal injuries is that they can appear to come and go! Some days it feels like your knee isn't injured at all and then suddenly it is bothering you again. This sensation comes if the piece of torn meniscus lays down flat and in the joint and doesn't affect the functioning of the joint. But it can rear its ugly head again at any time (the flap can lift or get caught in the joint) and the problem with your knee then seems to have returned again!

### 4) Patellar or Quadriceps Tendonitis

Symptoms not yet matching up? Maybe you have injured one of the tendons around your knee. Tendons attach muscle to bone. The patellar and quadriceps tendons around the knee attach the thigh muscle (the quadriceps) to the bones of your knee and they are particularly prone to becoming overworked and inflamed if you use your muscles and the knee joint a lot, like when repetitively jumping, running, or squatting.

The pain with tendonitis is easy to put your finger on, unlike some other knee pain. When the patellar tendon is affected the pain can be easily touched when you bend your knee and feel just below your kneecap onto the thick band of tissue that is there. The pain from quadriceps tendonitis is just above your knee, between the muscle and the kneecap. There isn't usually any obvious puffy swelling but the tendon may feel a bit thickened compared to the other side. Although injury to these tendons can come on from a direct hit to them, as mentioned above, most often the pain comes on over time after repetitive bending and straightening of your knee like when stair climbing, running or jumping. The problem with having an inflamed **or frayed** tendon in your knee is that it may feel fine but then even a small amount of activity will start to bother it, like when you have to climb a flight of stairs or walk a short distance. Those poor sensitive tendons!

## 5) Baker's Cyst

Do you have a large squishy lump at the back of your knee that hurts when you bend your knee right in? You may have a Baker's cyst. A Baker's cyst is basically a bunch of swelling behind your knee but the cyst itself is not the main problem. A Baker's cyst indicates that there is something going on inside your knee causing the inflammation, like osteoarthritis or a meniscal tear. You may be able to feel the swelling behind your knee if you touch both knees at the same time with your knees slightly bent. Someone else may be able to see the swelling at the back of the knee if you lay on your stomach with both knees straight. Not a baker? You can still get a Baker's cyst! The name is actually for the guy who first described this type of cyst, not because baking cinnamon buns makes you prone to getting one!

## 6) Fat Pad Irritation

Bet you didn't even know that you have a pad of fat around your knee? You do! (And in many other places in your body of course, too.) The fat pad in the knee is there to cushion some of the knee and to protect part of the knee from pinching as it straightens. The fat pad at the knee is below your knee and on either side of the thick patellar tendon (described above). If you bend your knee to 90 degrees and run your fingers down your kneecap you will come to two soft little indentations just past your knee cap, behind your fingers is the fat pad! You will feel the thick patellar tendon in between your fingers. Although the fat pad's primary job is to protect the knee and stop pinching, in some cases it can get pinched itself which causes inflammation, and starts to cause pain. If your fat pad is the cause of your pain, you will feel it when you touch the fat pad and your pain will come on when you fully straighten your knee out or if you stand up and hyperextend your knee. Ouch! Who knew fat could be so painful?



## 7) Osteoarthritis

We know you hear this term all the time, but what does it really mean? Literally osteo means bone and arthritis means inflammation of the joint. Basically it is wear and tear of the joint. Osteoarthritis, or sometimes just called OA, is one of the most common causes of knee pain in patients over the age of 45. Younger people can get it too though, so age does not exclude you! OA is not an injury that comes on overnight or from one hit to the knee; it develops over time, usually as the result of a previous injury that has damaged the knee somehow, or from a prolonged period (such as a lifetime!) of using the knee repetitively in a not-so optimal way.

OA of the knee is a spectrum of pain; you may have mild or you may have severe OA, **but the symptoms don't always match the severity seen on x-ray**. The pain from OA is generally widespread through the knee, but in many cases it feels like it is more on the inside (medial side) of the knee. Your knee is often sore and stiff in the morning or if you sit for a long period, but then feels like it loosens up and doesn't bother you as much once you get it moving. Walking for a long period can bother your knee, as can getting up from a chair (particularly if it is a low one), getting in and out of a car, going up (or even worse, going down) stairs, and it may feel sore after doing any of your regular physical activities. If the OA on the more advanced side of the spectrum you might notice the knee gets generally swollen. Most knees with OA don't like the cold weather. Has anyone ever told you they can feel a weather change coming because their knees are getting sore? That is because of OA! Applying heat or soaking your knee in a warm bath often relieves the pain of OA, as does just plain rest from activity. In more advanced cases of knee OA you may hear your knee creaking as you move it. Very severe cases of knee OA are unfortunately bound for the surgical theatre in order to get a knee replacement.

## 8) Knee Fracture

Quick! Get to your doctor or the **nearest Emergency Department** for an x-ray. If you have had a serious fall onto your knee, particularly if it has been from any height at all, or if something has hit hard into your knee, you may have fractured one of the bones in your knee! Sometimes even landing on your feet very hard can fracture your knee. With a knee fracture your knee is usually very painful and difficult to walk on, often shows some swelling immediately, and may be significantly bruised. That being said, some fractures are small, well hidden, or are not displaced at all so may not be as painful or limiting as you think they would be. A lot of knee fractures are often missed on the first examination. A fracture in the knee will need an x-ray in order to properly confirm its presence, and you may need

a brace or surgery in order to help it heal so if you suspect you have fractured your knee, don't delay in getting it looked at!

## Finale

So now you have 8 easy ways for you to help yourself with your knee injury all on your own. You might even be able to determine what exactly is causing your pain by referring to the extra information provided above.

There is no better way to confirm what is causing your knee pain and to get **DEFINITE** relief from it than by contacting your highly qualified Physical Therapist at Physical Therapy NOW. They can get you on your way to getting rid of your pain for good! So what are you waiting for? Come on in or call and book an appointment at Physical Therapy NOW. Don't suffer any longer with knee pain! You 'knee-d' your joint to do everything!