Knee Osteoarthritis

What is Knee Osteoarthritis (OA)?

The knee is formed between the bottom end of the thigh bone (femur) and the top end of the shin bone (tibia). The ends of the bones are covered by a smooth slippery surface, known as cartilage.

OA is a natural process which develops as we age.

The main symptoms of osteoarthritis are joint pain and stiffness. For some people, the symptoms can be mild and may come and go. Other people can experience more continuous and severe problems which make it difficult to carry out everyday activities.

Many of us will not be aware that our knee is naturally ageing as we are able to continue to function normally and remain pain free.

However, you are more likely to develop pain if you are overweight or you have had a previous knee injury.

You may also experience noise such as clicking or grating when you move your knee. This is called crepitus. Crepitus is not a sign of joint damage and occurs in healthy joints too.

What are the symptoms of OA knee?

- Pain and/or swelling around the knee
- Stiffness (first thing in the morning and after sitting/standing for a long time)
- Giving way

How is it diagnosed?

Diagnosis is made from your symptoms, the history of the problem, and an examination of your knee. Tests such as X-rays are sometimes ordered to confirm your diagnosis.

How is it treated?

- Pain relief: over the counter pain relief such as paracetamol and ibuprofen or anti-inflammatory gels may help you to continue exercising. A steroid injection may be offered if pain is a significant problem
- Ice: wrap an ice pack in a towel and place against the joint for 15 - 20 minutes
- Activity modification: try to keep the knee moving within your limits of pain
- Maintaining a healthy weight
- Exercises: to improve strength and flexibility

If you follow the advice and exercises on this leaflet, it is very likely that your symptoms will improve. However, this may take up to 12 weeks. If your symptoms do not improve after this period, please contact your clinician.
Exercises

You may experience an initial increase in pain with these exercises. Do not worry, just do less repetitions next time and then gradually build up again. Your physiotherapist will guide you as to how many repetitions to do.

Static Quads
Straighten the affected leg and push your knee down into the bed, tightening your thigh muscles.

Straight leg Raise
Straighten your affected leg by tightening your thigh muscles. Then raise your leg approx. 2-3 inches off the bed.

Knee squats
Stand up tall. Hold onto a chair or work surface for support. Squat down and then stand up tall again.

Step ups
Step up onto the bottom step with your affected leg leading. Then step down with your non affected leading.

References:
https://www.cochrane.org/CD004376/MUSKEL_exercise-for-osteoarthritis-of-the-knee

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