

Knee problems are common. They are normally caused by injury or normal wear and tear and should settle within six weeks of following the advice provided here. As you get older, normal wear and tear can cause your knee problem to flare-up now and again, often for no reason.

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.

After 48 hours

- You should try to use your leg 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.
- Exercise really helps your knee and can relieve pain.

Should I take painkillers?

Painkillers can help you keep moving. However, it is important that if you are already taking medication for something else or have other health problems you check with the pharmacist at your local chemist before taking painkillers for your knee problem.

- You can use simple, over-the-counter painkillers (such as paracetamol) or anti-inflammatory medicines (such as ibuprofen) to help your pain. You can take both these medicines together.
 - Always follow the instructions on the packet.
 - You can only take two 500mg paracetamol every four to six hours, and no more than eight 500mg paracetamol in 24 hours. You should not take any more than this amount.
 - You can only take three 400mg ibuprofen a day. You should not take ibuprofen if you have stomach problems such as ulcers, have had a previous allergic reaction to ibuprofen or an injury in last 48 hours. Always take ibuprofen with or just after food. Don't take ibuprofen if you are pregnant.
 - If you have asthma, ibuprofen may make it worse, but if you have taken it before with no problems then you can safely take it again. If you are not sure, speak to your pharmacist.
 - Take them regularly, not just when you are sore, for the next three to four days only.
- **If you feel you still need pain relief after four days then speak to your pharmacist for advice.**

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 knee 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.

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. Don't 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.

For free and confidential advice about work, call the **Healthy Working Lives Adviceline** on 0800 019 2211.

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 flare things up 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.

Can my knee problem cause trouble anywhere else?

You may feel some pain in the muscles around your knee. This should improve, as your knee problem gets better.

Do I need to see my doctor?

Not normally. If you follow the right advice and take the right medication, your knee problem should improve over the next six weeks.

If you experience any of the following, you need to speak to your doctor.

- Difficulty putting weight on your leg.
- Your knee locking or giving way.
- A hot and swollen knee.
- Pain that gets worse and worse.
- Your knee problem has not improved within six weeks.

Further information

 **NHS 24 self-help guide (www.nhs24.com/selfhelpguide)**

 **Musculoskeletal Zone and smartphone app from NHS inform (www.nhsinform.co.uk/msk)**

 **Arthritis Research UK (www.arthritisresearchuk.org)**

 **NHS 24 A-Z (<http://www.nhsinform.co.uk/health-library.aspx>)**

Facts and figures

- One in three teenagers have knee problems at some point.
- Osteoarthritis, normal wear and tear of the knee is very common as you get older. This can cause pain and stiffness in your knee.