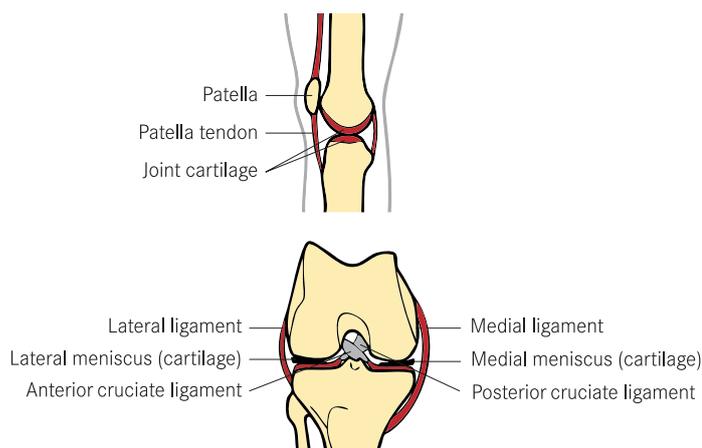


What is a knee injury?

Knee injuries happen to people of all ages. They can be caused in many ways and affect many of the different structures that support the knee. Common knee injuries include *sprains* (over-stretching of the ligaments), *strains* (over-stretching of muscles and tendons), tearing of the cartilage that lines the joints, and irritation of the kneecap joint.



What are the symptoms?

When soft tissues such as ligaments and muscles are damaged, there is pain, swelling and sometimes bruising. Pain is usually at its worst in the first two to three days.

Treatment

You may need an x-ray to check if you have a broken bone (*fracture*). In some cases a diagnosis is not possible until the swelling goes down.

You may be advised to wear a leg brace (*splint*) for a period of time, or avoid particular movements or activities until your knee heals.

Significant injuries may require an operation to fix torn ligaments or cartilage. Most injuries, however, do not need surgery.

If you have pain, simple pain medication may help (such as paracetamol or codeine). Anti-inflammatory medication can also help reduce swelling. Ask your health-care professional what is best for you.

First aid for knee injuries

The initial treatment (first 72 hours) for knee injuries is based on the 'RICE' principles: Rest, Ice, Compression and Elevation.

- Rest** Avoid activities that cause pain. If you are unable to put weight on your leg comfortably, use crutches.
- Ice** Wrap ice cubes in a damp towel, use frozen peas or a sports ice pack in a towel. Apply to the injured area for 15-20 minutes every one to two hours that you are awake. Never apply ice directly to the skin.
- Compression** Apply a firm bandage around the affected area. Ensure the bandage does not increase your pain or restrict blood flow.
- Elevation** When resting, raise your leg (with pillows) so it is above the level of your heart.

In the first 48-72 hours, **avoid 'HARM'** – heat, alcohol, re-injury and massage.

- Heat** Increases blood flow and swelling.
- Alcohol** Increases blood flow and swelling, and can make you less aware of aggravating your injury.
- Reinjury** Protect your joint until it has healed adequately.
- Massage** Promotes blood flow and swelling. Massage can increase damage if begun too early.

Prevention

There are simple measures you can take to reduce your risk of a knee injury.

- Warm up before exercise.
- Use activity appropriate footwear and equipment.
- Take care when exercising on uneven or slippery ground.
- Follow the directions of your health care professional.

What to expect

As the pain settles down after the first few days, gradually increase your level of activity. Be sure to keep your unaffected joints, such as your ankle and hips, moving as much as possible.

Most people fully recover in one to six weeks. If you are no better after a week, see your local doctor or physiotherapist. For more significant injuries, a physiotherapist can provide assistance with healing and rehabilitation.

Exercises

It is important to maintain flexibility and strength as you recover by doing the gentle exercises, shown below. Perform these exercises only if directed by your health care professional.

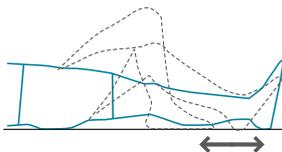
Exercise 1. Squeeze the back of your knee down into the ground and tighten your thigh muscles. Hold for five seconds. Repeat ten times every few hours.



Exercise 2. Bend your knee and dig your heel into the ground to tighten your thigh muscles. Hold for five seconds. Repeat ten times every few hours.



Exercise 3. Bend your knee up and down as far as comfortable. Repeat ten to 20 times every few hours.



Seeking help



In a **medical emergency** go to the nearest hospital emergency department or call an ambulance (dial 000).



See your local doctor, physiotherapist or health care professional if you have not improved at all after a week, especially if you are unable to put weight on your leg.



For health advice from a Registered Nurse you can call **NURSE-ON-CALL 24 hours a day** on **1300 60 60 24** for the cost of a local call from anywhere in Victoria.*

NURSE-ON-CALL provides access to **interpreting services** for callers not confident with English. Call **1300 60 60 24**.

*Calls from mobile calls may be charged at a higher rate



Want to know more?

- Ask your local doctor or health care professional.
- Contact a physiotherapist.
- Visit the **Better Health Channel** www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au

Notes:

If you would like to receive this publication in an **accessible format**, please phone 9096 0578 or email edfactsheets@health.vic.gov.au



December 2010. Also available online at www.health.vic.gov.au/edfactsheets

Disclaimer: This health information is for general education purposes only. Please consult with your doctor or other health professional to make sure this information is right for you.

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