

How can a physio help with knee pain?

The knee is a joint between your thigh (femur) and shin (tibia) bones which bends and straightens as we walk and acts as a shock absorber for activities such as running, jumping and landing. Between the two bones is a cartilage disc called the meniscus which acts as a shock absorber and improves stability of the joint.

The meniscus can become irritated if it is challenged with a sudden, forceful landing, an awkward twist, or can become sore if it is slowly challenged over a period of time. This will often lead to pain and/or swelling with certain movements of the knee such as bending, going upstairs, walking on uneven ground or jumping. It may also ache overnight or first thing in the morning.

A physiotherapist can assess knee pain to identify the irritated structure and in some cases may refer for investigations such as Xray or MRI to rule in or out serious structural damage to the knee. However, in many cases, this is not required and knee pain can be treated conservatively without the need for scans.

Even if people who have a tear to their meniscus confirmed on their MRI, conservative therapy such as exercise can be the best treatment with recent best-practice guidelines (1) recommending that arthroscopic surgery can be avoided in nearly all cases of meniscus tears, including those with acute onset of pain, mechanical symptoms and/or those with osteoarthritis or meniscus damage found on scans. Instead, recommended therapies included exercise therapy and in some cases medications or injections.

A specific range of motion, coordination and strengthening

exercises will aim to reduce your pain and swelling, help you start walking without pain, and return to work and sports as quickly as possible.

If you or someone you know has knee pain which doesn't seem to be getting better, seeing a physiotherapist for a tailored exercise program would be a great place to start.

1. Siemieniuk Reed A C, Harris Ian A, Agoritsas Thomas, Poolman Rudolf W, Brignardello-Petersen Romina, Van de Velde Stijn et al. Arthroscopic surgery for degenerative knee arthritis and meniscal tears: a clinical practice guideline BMJ 2017; 357 :j1982

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