
Understanding Knee Osteoarthritis

Scientific research has helped us understand knee osteoarthritis better.

Persistent knee pain, in people over 45 years old, is often called knee osteoarthritis.

Knee osteoarthritis affects the whole joint. There can be changes in the cartilage, bone, ligaments and muscles of your knee. Normal day to day activities can feel harder than they used to. Knee pain and stiffness is common. Knee osteoarthritis affects the whole joint. There can be changes in the cartilage, bone, ligaments and muscles of your knee. Normal day to day activities can feel harder than they used to. Knee pain and stiffness is common.

A lot of information about knee osteoarthritis is incorrect. Incorrect information is mostly old fashioned or out of date. We once thought knee osteoarthritis pain was 'wear and tear' of the knee joint leaving 'bone on bone'. New research has helped us understand knee osteoarthritis better. We now know this isn't true. In fact, we think the complete opposite is true. Knee osteoarthritis pain is most likely caused by a joint working extra hard to repair itself.

Here are some reasons we no longer think knee osteoarthritis pain is 'wear and tear' or 'bone on bone'.

Knee x-ray images are not an indication of knee symptoms.

Often a person's knee x-ray image does not match their symptoms. People can have a lot of

joint changes on x-ray but minimal or no pain. Others can have bad pain but the x-ray image doesn't show changes that explain the pain. We now know the knee's condition on x-ray does NOT equal the pain felt in the knee. This is why x-rays are no longer recommended to diagnose or manage painful knee osteoarthritis.

Pain can change daily. The condition of bone and cartilage does not.

An x-ray taken today will look the same as yesterday's x-ray, and last week's x-ray. In contrast, people with knee osteoarthritis know pain changes day to day or even hour to hour. Again, this shows us that there is a mismatch between pain and the joint's condition.

Not everyone gets worse.

In fact, only about a third of people get worse over time. Most people remain stable. They have bad patches and good patches but don't continue to worsen. Some people even get better over time. Avoiding exercise, like walking, to prevent the knees from 'wearing out' isn't correct. Walking and other exercise is actually a good way to reduce pain over time and keep the knees healthy.

Symptoms improve with movement.

You may have noticed in the morning your knee is stiff but loosens when you start moving. Moving acts like a joint lubricant. The old saying of 'use it, or lose it' holds true for knees. You need to use your body and knees in the way they were intended. Walk, dance, play golf, garden. Help keep your knees as healthy as possible.

References

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