
Understanding Knee Pain

Pain is the most common symptom of knee osteoarthritis.

Pain is the symptom that can interfere with life the most. Pain is the main reason people with knee osteoarthritis seek treatment.

It's also the main reason people with knee osteoarthritis avoid exercise.

Learning more about how pain works is very helpful. Especially when starting an exercise program.

Pain is complex. Pain is not a simple matter of - more damage leads to more pain.

There are a range of different factors that influence why and how you feel pain, including;

- the sensations from your knee joint, and surrounding muscle and tissues,
- your mood, anxiety and stress levels,
- your fatigue levels or quality of sleep,
- your thoughts, worries and fears about pain,
- sometimes just focussing too much on the pain can make it seem worse.

It's the brain and nervous system's job to make sense of all these things and decide if we feel pain and how much. Think of the brain like a volume dial. The brain interprets all the factors that influence our pain. The brain then decides to turn the pain level up or down. For example, when we feel stress or anxiety the pain volume turns up. When we do something fun that distracts us the pain volume can turn down.

It makes sense. If you're in pain you want to avoid activity. But being less active can make your pain worse over time. Inactivity causes muscle weakness. The knee might feel less stable. You can gain weight. Your mood and sleep problems can get worse. All of these things can make you avoid activity even more. It's a vicious cycle.

The best way to break the cycle of pain and less activity is:

- Strengthen your knee muscles. Strong muscles can keep the knee joint healthy and reduce pain. [My Knee Strength](#) will help you get started.
- Stay as active as you can. Using your knees can keep them healthy and reduce pain. It's also a good idea for weight management. [My Knee Activity](#) has tips to help you.
- Lose weight (if you need to).

As well as reduce pain you'll be improving your overall health. Research tells us, better overall health can also reduce knee pain.

Watch the video to hear Australian Pain Scientist, Professor Moseley. Here he describes new discoveries about persistent pain.

<http://mykneeexercise.org.au/my-knee-education/>

Exercise is a key step to managing knee pain. Exercise and movement are important parts of 'taming the beast'. Use the [My Knee Exercise](#) website to help you start exercise safely.

References

Butler, D. S., & Moseley, G. L. (2003). Explain Pain: Noigroup Publications.

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