

# Knee Pain

## What causes knee pain?

Knee pain can be caused by problems inside or outside the joint. The most common cause in older adults is arthritis. Another common cause is patellofemoral (puh-TELL-oh-FEM-uh-rul) pain syndrome, or PFPS for short. PFPS causes pain behind the kneecap that is worse after you sit for awhile, run, or climb stairs.

## How can I tell if I have these conditions?

Talk with your doctor about your knee pain. He or she will examine your knee and ask you questions to find out the cause. These questions can include:

- What part of your knee hurts?
- How long has it hurt?
- What activities or positions help the pain or make it worse?
- Have you tried any medicines to help the pain?
- Did you hurt yourself before it started?
- Does your knee give out, swell, lock, or catch?

During the knee exam, your doctor will:

- Check for any unusual appearance or swelling
- Feel the area around your knee
- Test how far your knee moves in different directions
- Test the muscles and nerves around the knee

Your doctor may order x-rays to help find out what is causing your knee pain.

## What can I do to feel better?

If you have arthritis in your knee, wear and tear eventually causes damage inside the joint. If you are overweight, losing weight takes extra pressure off the joints. Low-impact aerobic exercise such as biking or swimming can help. Your doctor may refer you to a physical therapist for a supervised exercise program.

Medicines can also help. Your doctor may recommend acetaminophen (one brand: Tylenol) or anti-inflammatory medicines like ibuprofen (one brand: Advil). Cortisone shots or a knee brace may help with the pain. Over-the-counter supplements like glucosamine and chondroitin probably won't help. Talk with your doctor to see which of these treatments might be right for you. If other treatments do not help, you may need surgery to replace the joint.

If you have PFPS, rest and pain medicines like acetaminophen, ibuprofen, or naproxen (one brand: Aleve) can help. Knee braces or shoe inserts can be used to help your knee move differently. Your doctor may also refer you to a physical therapist to help work on muscle imbalances around the knee and hips.



# Knee Pain *(continued)*

## Where can I get more information?

Your doctor

American Academy of Orthopaedic Surgeons  
<http://orthoinfo.aaos.org/menus/leg.cfm>

Arthritis Foundation  
<http://www.arthritis.org/about-arthritis/where-it-hurts/knee-pain/>

National Library of Medicine  
<http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/ency/article/003187.htm>

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## Notes:

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**This handout is provided to you by your family doctor and the American Academy of Family Physicians. Other health-related information is available from the AAFP online at <http://familydoctor.org>.**

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