



Knee Osteoarthritis (Knee OA)

What is Knee Osteoarthritis (knee OA)?

Knee OA is a condition that can affect one or both of your knee joints. It is characterised by the destruction of cartilage, leading to rough and uneven joint surfaces. Knee OA may present with pain during weight-bearing activities, swelling around the knee, particularly after exercise or a feeling of stiffness around the knee joint. Knee OA is common in people who have had a previous knee injury or who have undertaken years of continuous, heavy-duty weight-bearing activity.

Why does it happen?

The exact cause of knee osteoarthritis is unknown however several factors can contribute to the increased risk of having OA. These factors include;

- Age, OA is more common in the older population due to the gradual wear and tear of the joint over time.
- Obesity due to the increased stress placed on your weight-bearing joints
- Manual labour/sport resulting in increased wear and tear of the joint
- Previous joint injury
- Genetics, due to a defect in one of your genes that is responsible for manufacturing cartilage (protective cushion at the end of your bones)

What can a physiotherapist do?

Although there is currently no cure for OA your physiotherapist can assist you in managing your condition and help ease the pain.

Exercise is one of the most important and beneficial treatments for OA. It can assist with the strength, support and stability around your joints and help to reduce load through the joint. Exercise programs that the physiotherapist develops are individualized to best suit your needs. Low impact exercise is beneficial for people with OA. Exercise programs could involve cycling, tai chi, hydrotherapy and pilates.

The physiotherapist can also provide treatment and give you education and advice on methods to reduce the inflammation and stiffness within your knee. Treatment may involve mobilisations, soft-tissue therapy, electrotherapy and taping or bracing for support. In particular, a quadriceps strengthening program may be designed to assist in providing stability to the knee and offloading pressure at the knee joint.

Pain management is an important aspect of the control of your knee OA. Your physiotherapist will work closely with your doctor and pharmaceutical provider to assist you in managing your pain.

Outcome

In the early stages of knee OA, with appropriate physiotherapy intervention and pain relief, you can effectively manage your arthritic pain so that it has little implications on your daily activity. In severe cases or when conservative treatment fails joint replacement may be necessary.