



Osteoarthritis of the knee

This grid is designed to help you and your clinician decide how best to deal with pain in your knee. The first steps are to make sure you are not overweight, to become as fit as possible for your age and consider having physiotherapy.

| Frequently asked questions | Pain killers | Joint injections (steroids) | Knee replacement surgery |
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| Will this reduce the pain I have in my knee? | Yes, but depends on what over the counter tablets are taken. Tablets like ibuprofen are effective for 50 in every 100 people. Over the counter tablets, like paracetamol or similar, including those that have codeine, are also effective. | Yes, 30 in every 100 people should expect to get good pain relief and reduced swelling after an injection. | Yes, 90 people in every 100 who have this operation say it leads to improvement and pain relief: 10 in a 100 do not feel the operation made a difference. |
| Will this help improve what I can manage to do? | Yes, to some extent. Plan to become more active as a result of pain relief. Advice from a physiotherapist may help. | Yes, usually for a month or so. Plan to be more active as a result of the relief. Advice from a physiotherapist may help. | Yes, many patients experience improvement - but not everybody sees differences in their ability to walk or climb stairs. |
| Are there any risks to this treatment? | Pain killers that have codeine have side effects: constipation is common but can usually be prevented by using senna. Tablets like ibuprofen lead to problems more often, e.g., heart problems and irritation of the stomach lining for 17 in every 100 people taking tablets like ibuprofen for long periods of time. | There is a small risk of frequent injections causing cartilage damage, especially in weight-bearing joints. Allergic reactions are rare. Your clinician will be able to advise you more specifically about these risks. | Wound infection occurs in 5 in every 100 people. Blood clots in the leg occur in 2 in every 100 people. Risk from surgery rises if you have other conditions, such as heart or lung disease, are a smoker or are overweight. |
| How long will I take to recover from the treatment? | This question is not relevant for pain killers. | You might feel the pain of the injection for a few days. | You will stay in hospital for around four or five days. Most people walk unaided after 3 months. Full recovery may take between 6 to 12 months. |
| Will I need to have more treatment or surgery? | If you have a problem, talk to your clinician about other options. | Pain relief lasts for a month or so. You can only have up to 4 injections a year. | Most knee replacements can last 15 years, many last longer. |
| What are the outcomes for people with arthritis who have this treatment? | Many people cope well by using medication, being active and losing weight. | Many people have good relief by having injections when swelling and pain cause problems. | Surgery is usually considered after other options. About 80 in every 100 people are satisfied after having a new knee. About 20 in every 100 are not satisfied. |

Arthritis Care has a free confidential helpline 0808 800 4050 that can provide you with information and support.

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