

I Have Knee Pain

Understanding What May Be Causing It

You Are Not Alone

Knee pain is one of the most common reasons people seek medical care. It affects people of all ages — from teenagers in sport to older adults managing arthritis — and can range from a mild nuisance to a condition that seriously limits daily life. The good news is that most knee pain has an identifiable cause and responds well to the right treatment.

What Are the Most Common Causes of Knee Pain?

From the joint itself:

- Osteoarthritis — wear and tear of the cartilage
- Meniscus tear — damage to the cushioning cartilage pads
- Ligament sprains or tears (ACL, MCL, LCL, PCL)
- Bursitis — inflammation of the fluid-filled sacs cushioning the knee
- Plica syndrome — irritation of a fold of tissue inside the knee

From the kneecap area:

- Patellofemoral syndrome — kneecap tracking problems
- Chondromalacia — cartilage breakdown behind the kneecap
- Patellar tendinopathy (jumper's knee) — tendon irritation below the kneecap

From the tendons and soft tissue:

- IT band syndrome — tightness of the band running along the outer thigh
- Hamstring or quad strain
- Pes anserine bursitis — inner knee pain, especially at night

From other causes:

- Referred pain from the hip or lower back — the knee feels it but is not the source
- Fracture — from a fall or impact
- Infection or gout — cause of sudden, severe, hot swelling

What Does the Location of Pain Tell Us?

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- Front of the knee — often kneecap-related (PFS, chondromalacia, patellar tendon)
 - Inner (medial) side — often medial meniscus, MCL, or medial OA
 - Outer (lateral) side — often lateral meniscus, LCL, or IT band
 - Back of the knee — often hamstring, Baker's cyst, or posterior meniscus
 - All around the knee — often arthritis, bursitis, or significant swelling

What Makes Knee Pain Worse in General?

- Stairs — especially descending
- Prolonged walking, standing, or sitting
- Squatting or kneeling
- Twisting or pivoting
- Getting up after rest

When Should I Seek Immediate Care?

- The knee cannot bear any weight following an injury
- Obvious deformity, significant bruising, or a pop at the time of injury
- Rapid, severe swelling within minutes of an injury (possible blood in the joint)
- The knee is hot, red, and extremely swollen without injury — possible infection or gout
- Fever accompanying joint swelling

Why a Physical Therapy Evaluation Matters

An accurate diagnosis is the foundation of effective treatment. Your physical therapist will perform a thorough evaluation — examining your movement, strength, flexibility, and joint mechanics — to determine the most likely source of your pain and build a targeted treatment plan. Most causes of knee pain respond very well to physical therapy without the need for imaging, injections, or surgery.

The good news: most causes of knee pain respond very well to PT — and getting an accurate diagnosis early leads to faster, more complete recovery.

This information is for general educational purposes only and is not a substitute for a professional evaluation. Call us today — we have immediate openings with no waitlist.

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