

My Kneecap Hurts All the Time

Understanding & Treating Persistent Kneecap Pain

What Could Be Causing This?

Persistent pain around or behind the kneecap (patella) is extremely common and can have several overlapping causes. The kneecap sits in a groove on the thigh bone and acts like a pulley for the quadriceps muscle — it is under significant force with nearly every movement of the leg. When something disrupts how it moves or how much pressure it bears, pain follows.

The most common causes of persistent kneecap pain include:

- Patellofemoral syndrome — abnormal tracking of the kneecap in its groove
- Chondromalacia patellae — softening and breakdown of the cartilage on the back of the kneecap
- Patellar tendinopathy — irritation or degeneration of the tendon below the kneecap
- Bursitis — inflammation of the fluid-filled sac in front of the kneecap (from repetitive kneeling or direct trauma)
- Patellar dislocation or subluxation — the kneecap partially or fully shifts out of its groove
- Arthritis — cartilage wear under the kneecap, common with age

What Does It Feel Like?

- Aching pain at the front of the knee, behind or around the kneecap
- Pain that is constant at rest, or comes on with almost any activity
- Grinding, crunching, or grating sensation when bending the knee
- Swelling around the kneecap — diffuse puffiness or a localized fluid-filled bump
- Pain that makes it hard to sit comfortably for more than 20–30 minutes
- Difficulty with stairs, squatting, or rising from a chair
- In some cases, the kneecap feels unstable or like it might shift

Why Is It Happening All the Time?

Constant or near-constant kneecap pain usually means the underlying problem is not being addressed — the mechanics are off, the muscles are weak or unbalanced, and the joint is

under stress continuously. Common contributors include:

- Weak quadriceps — particularly the inner quad (VMO) that centers the kneecap
- Weak hip muscles — causing the knee to collapse inward with every step
- Tight IT band or lateral knee structures — pulling the kneecap outward
- Tight calf or hamstrings — altering how force travels through the knee
- Poor footwear or overpronation
- Repetitive activities without adequate recovery

When Should I Seek Urgent Care?

- Visible deformity or the kneecap clearly shifted to one side (possible dislocation)
- Sudden severe pain and swelling after a specific event
- Inability to bear weight
- Warmth, redness, and fever — possible infection

The Good News

Persistent kneecap pain, while frustrating, is highly treatable. Physical therapy directly addresses the root causes — strengthening the right muscles, improving kneecap tracking, releasing tight structures, and modifying the activities that are overloading the joint. Many patients who have had kneecap pain for months or even years achieve significant relief within weeks of starting a targeted program.

Even long-standing kneecap pain can achieve **significant relief within weeks** of a targeted physical therapy program.

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