

Knee Arthritis

What You Need to Know

What Is Knee Arthritis?

Arthritis literally means inflammation of a joint. In the knee, arthritis causes pain, stiffness, and reduced function — and can range from mild and occasional to severe and constant. There are several types, but the two most common in the knee are osteoarthritis (wear and tear) and rheumatoid arthritis (an autoimmune condition). Others include post-traumatic arthritis (following a prior injury), gout, and psoriatic arthritis.

Types of Knee Arthritis

Osteoarthritis (OA) — most common

- Gradual breakdown of cartilage over time
- More common after age 50, but can occur earlier following injury
- Pain tends to worsen with activity and improve with rest

Rheumatoid Arthritis (RA)

- An autoimmune disease where the immune system attacks the joint lining
- Causes significant swelling, warmth, and stiffness — often in both knees
- Morning stiffness lasting more than an hour is a hallmark symptom
- Managed with medication plus physical therapy

Post-Traumatic Arthritis

- Develops years after a significant knee injury (fracture, ligament tear, meniscus damage)
- Injury disrupts cartilage and accelerates its breakdown

What Does It Feel Like?

- Pain that varies from a dull ache to sharp pain with movement
- Stiffness — especially first thing in the morning or after sitting
- Swelling that may come and go, or be persistent
- Warmth and sometimes redness around the joint (more common in RA and gout)

- Reduced range of motion — difficulty fully bending or straightening the knee
- A grinding or grating sensation with movement
- Weakness in the leg due to pain-related muscle inhibition

What Makes It Worse?

- Prolonged standing or walking
- Stairs and inclines
- Cold or damp weather (for many patients)
- Overexertion or high-impact activity
- Being overweight — every extra pound adds 4 pounds of pressure on the knee joint

When Should I Be Concerned?

- Sudden, severe increase in swelling — could indicate a flare or joint infection
- Fever alongside joint swelling — possible septic arthritis (medical emergency)
- Joint that is hot, red, and extremely tender — warrants urgent evaluation
- Inability to bear weight following a fall or impact

The Good News

Knee arthritis is manageable. Physical therapy is one of the most effective non-surgical treatments — strengthening the muscles around the knee dramatically reduces load on the joint, eases pain, and improves daily function. Exercise, even when it seems counterintuitive, is among the best things you can do for arthritic knees.

Research consistently shows that **movement is the best medicine** for knee arthritis — the right exercise program can reduce pain as effectively as many medications.

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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