



## Walking to Ease Knee Pain

It's a Catch-22 when you have knee pain from osteoarthritis. It hurts, so you don't want to move. But if you exercise, it can eventually make your knees feel better. "I've gone a period of time when I haven't moved a joint much and, when I first start, it's a little bit sore," says Denver physical therapist Eric Robertson, who has osteoarthritis. Robertson knows what it's like to be achy when he first starts moving. Your knee may hurt and ache, but it shouldn't keep you from doing your usual activities, he says.

If you have OA, you may be a little uncomfortable when you first begin moving because there's some inflammation in your knee, says Jemima Albayda, MD, a rheumatologist at Johns Hopkins University. "But when you start walking, it should feel better."

There are many ways that walking helps ease the pain of knee OA.

**Rebuilds joints.** When you have OA, cartilage -- the springy tissue in your joints that acts like a shock absorber for your knees -- can become damaged and worn. The result: pain, stiffness, and problems moving. Exercise can help rebuild the joint, Robertson says. "Cartilage is like a sponge, and it gets nutrients from the compression and decompression of your body weight as you walk."

**Strengthens your legs.** Walking builds your muscles so they can take the pressure off your joints and handle more of the weight themselves. That means less pain for your knees.

**Helps you lose weight.** For every pound you lose, there's four times less pressure and stress on your knees. When there's less pressure, there's less pain. That can make a big difference to painful joints. Walking is a great low-impact way to help you lose extra weight, Albayda says.

### Listen to Your Body

To stay healthy, you should get 30 minutes of exercise most days of the week. You don't have to get it all at once -- 10 minutes of walking here and there is a great idea. But don't push yourself, Albayda says. "Some people get so excited that they overdo it and get sore the next day. I always say try a little bit one day and see how you do."

#### Some warning signs that you should stop:

- Sudden increase in swelling
- Pain so severe you can't stand on one leg
- Feeling unstable, like you might fall down
- Aches and pains, higher than a 4 or 5 on a scale of 1 to 10

### Get Help if You Need It

Make sure you have good walking shoes, Albayda says. After you walk, if you have soreness or swelling, lie down with your legs raised and put ice on your knees.

If walking hurts, talk to your doctor. You may have problems with knee alignment, so assistive devices might help, such as custom-made inserts for your shoes. Figure out what help you need so you can get moving.

"Trust your body and trust the fact that we are made to move, and motion itself has a healing effect," Robertson says. "What may feel a little achy at first will have some great results -- not only [in] how your knees feel, but in how your whole body feels."

Sources: Mary Jo DiLonardo, WebMD Feature Writer <http://www.webmd.com/osteoarthritis/features/knee-pain-walk>

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