

Struggling with knee pain? Try these exercises

Knee injuries are common and recovery takes time, patience, and consistency. With the right exercises, you can ease pain, rebuild strength, restore mobility, and prevent future injuries.

BY TONY MUSHOBOROZI

Knee injuries are quite common and often occur due to sports activities, overuse, or weakness and imbalance in the muscles surrounding the joint. More serious damage, such as ligament tears, can result from sudden twists, falls, or motor vehicle accidents. Other contributing factors include ageing, excess body weight, and neglecting warm-ups before workouts, which can leave the knees vulnerable.

Recovering from a knee injury requires time and patience. For some individuals, achieving full recovery can take years. It involves consistent effort and the right combination of exercises designed not only to alleviate pain but also to rebuild strength, restore mobility, and prevent future injuries.

Sports doctor Ntege Ssengendo emphasises that the most effective recovery plans incorporate flexibility, strength, balance, and a gradual return to movement. He notes that the optimal rehabilitation strategy depends on the specific type of injury, whether it is a ligament tear, meniscus issue, tendonitis, or another condition.

For the best results, he advises consulting a professional before starting any rehabilitation

programme. Below are some movements to consider trying.

1. Early-stage recovery: Restoring movement

In the immediate post-injury phase, the doctor advises focusing on gentle movements to reduce stiffness and improve circulation. Keeping a regular schedule conditions the body to recover sooner.

Heel slides: Lie on your back and slowly slide your heel toward your body, bending the knee upwards, then extending it back to the original position. Ssengendo says this helps improve range of motion if you do 10 to 15 reps, two to three times a day.

Quad sets: Tighten your thigh muscles while keeping your leg straight and hold for five to 10 seconds. This activates the muscles around the knee without stressing the joint itself. Repeat 10 to 15 times.

2. Strengthening exercises

These exercises are recommended once stiffness has waned. The next stage is to strengthen muscles that support the knee, especially the quadriceps, hamstrings, and glutes.

Straight leg raises: Lift one leg while keeping it straight, hold briefly, then lower slowly. If pain is too much, support the leg in the initial stages and gradually rely on your leg muscles only. Endur-

ing 10 to 15 reps three to four times a day should help you gain strength in the knee.

Hamstring curls: Stand and bend your knee. Using your hand, bring your heel toward your buttocks, targeting the back of the thigh. For progression, add ankle weights to build even more strength.

Wall squats: Stand with your back against a wall and slowly slide down into a sitting position. This builds overall knee stability if done regularly, according to Ssengendo. Hold five to 10 seconds and repeat eight to 10 times a day.

3. Balance

After strength has returned, it is time to focus on balance and stability. These exercises help prevent re-injury by improving coordination and joint control.

Single-leg stand: Stand on one leg for 20 to 30 seconds. Beginners can stand against a wall and gradually let go. As stability improves, progress by closing your eyes and finally balancing on an unstable surface.

4. Flexibility

Maintaining flexibility is crucial for reducing stress on the knee joint. The knee depends heavily on surrounding muscles and tissues to move smoothly and absorb force. It reduces excessive joint pressure, improves alignment, and enhances shock absorption.

Hamstring stretch: Tight hamstrings are a major contributor to knee strain. These stretches can be done standing, seated, or lying down.

Standing hamstring stretch (beginner-friendly): Stand upright and place one heel on a step or bench.

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Caution. Stop if you feel sharp pain. Listen to your body always. Mild discomfort is okay; sharp pain is not. Warm up before exercising. Cool down afterwards. Consistency matters more than intensity. Most importantly, consider working with a physical therapist for a personalised plan,” says Dr Ntege Ssengendo, a sports doctor.

Recovering from a knee injury requires the right combination of exercises designed not only to alleviate pain but also to rebuild strength, restore mobility, and prevent future injuries. PHOTO/FILE

Keep the other leg straight but do not lock the knee. Keep your back straight and lean forward from your hips. Stop when you feel a stretch in the back of your thigh. Hold for 20 to 30 seconds and repeat two to three times per leg.

5. Gradual return to activity

Experts warn that rushing back into intense activities like soccer or jogging could cause a new injury. To progress slowly, start with long walks and add some weights.

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6. Mindset matters

Recovering from a knee injury is as much mental as it is physical. Setting realistic goals and celebrating small milestones, such as bending the knee further or walking a longer distance, can boost motivation. Ssengendo emphasises that frustration and impatience are common, but staying consistent with exercises ensures better long-term results.

7. Nutrition supports recovery

A healthy diet also plays a role in healing. Foods rich in protein, omega-3 fatty acids, and vitamins C and D can support muscle repair, reduce inflammation, and strengthen bones and joints. Hydration, too, is key, as well-hydrated tissues recover more efficiently. Combining exercise with proper nutrition helps the knee regain strength faster.

QUICK RECOVERY TIPS

● **Listen to your body:** Stop at sharp pain; mild discomfort is normal.

● **Warm up and cool down:** Protect joints and muscles.

● **Consistency over intensity:** Daily effort beats occasional intense workouts.

● **Progress gradually:** Gentle movements equals strength, balance and full activity.

● **Professional guidance:** Personalised advice speeds recovery and prevents setbacks.

