

# Caring for your knee injury

*Here are some tips to help you recover successfully from a knee injury, such as a torn or stretched ligament or cartilage.*

The time it takes to recover will depend on the type and amount of damage to your knee. However, these tips give you some general ideas on what to do over the next few days, and as your injury gradually heals.

If you develop significant, rapid swelling at any stage, it's important to see a health professional (eg, a GP or physiotherapist) as soon as possible.

## What to do over the next 2-3 days

This is when you'll probably experience the most pain and swelling. To deal with this, follow RICE:

- **Rest** – Reduce the length of time you spend standing and walking.
- **Ice** – Place ice wrapped in a damp towel on your knee every 2 hours, leaving it there for up to 20 minutes each time.
- **Compression** – Firm (but not tight) bandaging helps reduce swelling. Remove the bandage at night.
- **Elevation** – Keep your injured leg raised and straight on a pillow. This will help reduce bleeding and swelling.

Try to avoid the following, which may slow your recovery:

- **H** – Heat, eg hot showers, hot packs
- **A** – Alcohol
- **R** – Running
- **M** – Massage.

Paracetamol can help with pain, but avoid aspirin, which can increase bleeding. If you're not sure which painkiller to buy, ask your doctor or pharmacist for advice.



## After 3 days

After 3 days, you should try to walk normally, ie, heel to toe. Try not to limp.

As well as walking, it's also a good idea to start other activities that can help get your knee moving again, such as cycling, aqua jogging and swimming (but not breaststroke, which may put too much strain on your knee).

You may still experience pain and swelling for up to 7 days after your injury, but after the first week things should start to settle down.

Return to see your health professional immediately if you have significant, rapid swelling at any stage following injury.

Further information on knee injuries and correct sports techniques is available online at [www.acc.co.nz](http://www.acc.co.nz) or can be ordered from ACC on **0800 802 444**.

## When to seek extra help

After 7 days, most knee injuries are well on the road to recovery. However, you should see a health professional if:

- your pain and swelling don't settle after 7 days
- your knee feels worse with walking
- you get numbness or tingling in the calf or foot
- you have trouble putting weight on your leg
- your knee gives way unexpectedly
- your knee locks up, ie, you have difficulty straightening or bending it
- you are worried about your knee injury.

Sometimes, an x-ray or MRI scan may be necessary. But in most cases, your health professional will be able to diagnose and manage your injury without these investigations.

## Getting back to normal activity

Eventually, it should be possible to do all the things you used to do before your injury, including playing sport. But this will depend on the specific nature of your injury.

Always follow your health professional's advice – they'll tell you what's safe to do, and when it's safe to do it. Starting sport too early or without proper care can increase the chance of another injury later on, so it's important to take things one step at a time.

To help your recovery, your health professional may suggest a rehabilitation programme, including specific exercises to help you get back to everyday activities/sport.

Wearing a brace is generally not required for most knee injuries.

## Returning to work

Research shows that if you stay at work or return quickly, even part-time, you'll recover more effectively.

This is because most work involves some physical activity, and this helps the body to heal. By working, you'll also stay in touch with your employer and workmates, you'll protect your job and you'll maintain your skills.

In addition, you'll be financially better off at work, because you can often earn up to your full wage, even if you're only working part-time.

Your health professional knows how important it is to help you return safely to work. Talk to them about how you can recover from your injury at work.

## Think positively

Keep reminding yourself that you will get better. With proper care, most knee injuries heal well. Following your health professional's advice will give you the greatest chance of a quick and full recovery.

Tips to prevent another injury:

- Stay fit.
- Wear well-fitting shoes.
- Always warm up, cool down and stretch before and after physical activity.
- Keep doing any strengthening and balancing exercises recommended by your health professional.
- When playing sport, use the correct technique when landing from jumps and when changing direction, to avoid twisting your knee.
- Prepare for sport with pre-season fitness training.

This information is not intended as a substitute for professional medical care or advice.

Provided for your help and support by ACC freephone **0800 101 996**.