Finding the Best Knee Exercises for Your Osteoarthritis

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Osteoarthritis Knee Exercises

When dealing with the nagging pain of osteoarthritis, exercise is probably the furthest thing from your mind. If the pain is already there, the exercise will only make matters worse, right? You might be surprised to learn that taking steps to add strength and mobility to your joints can actually relieve the pain. Less pain equals a healthier and more fulfilling life, so anyone with osteoarthritis should consider exercises today.

Osteoarthritis Basics

Sometimes referred to as "wear and tear" arthritis, osteoarthritis is the most common form of the ailment. This arthritis forms when the cushion that separates the bones begins to deteriorate, resulting in bone rubbing against bone with no buffer.

Although osteoarthritis can impact any joint in the body, the condition is very common in the knees due to strenuous exercise like sports or simple activities like walking and climbing stairs. In the past, experts believed this form of arthritis was triggered by too much activity, but now, they view it as a disease of the knee joint.

Anyone can experience the discomfort of osteoarthritis, but some factors may contribute to the condition like:

- Older age
- Past history of joint injury
- Overusing the joint
- Being overweight or obese
- Lacking muscle tone
- Having family members with the condition
- Being female

Best Knee Exercises for Osteoarthritis

Now that you know what osteoarthritis is all about and how it can affect your life, it is time to learn how you can combat the issue. Exercising the knee presents quite a challenge in many situations. Since the knee is a joint held together by connective tissue like tendons and ligaments, it is impossible to strengthen the knee directly. Instead, a person must target the areas surrounding the knee to produce the desired outcome.

Knee exercises can prove strenuous at first, so be sure to start slow, practice patience during your progress, and always consult your doctor about the exercises suited for your situation. These are the top exercises to address osteoarthritis in the knee:

1. Quadriceps Contraction

To perform this exercise, find yourself lying face up on a firm and stable surface. The floor could be an option as long as you can get yourself back up.

Next, roll a towel up and place it under the knee of the leg you want to exercise. The leg you exercise should be straightened, while the other leg is either straight or bent, depending on your comfort.

Once in position, begin tightening the straight leg with focus on contracting the large muscle above the knee called the quadriceps. By tensing the muscle and pushing the knee down into the towel for five seconds at a time, a person can add tone to their quad.

2. Leg Raise

By strengthening the quadriceps, you can take some pressure off of the knee and stabilize the lower body. Another exercise that helps tone the quad is called a leg raise.

To perform a leg raise, lie on your back on a stable surface and slowly raise your straightened leg. In this exercise, keep your opposite knee bent with your foot on the surface to support your back.

Once your heel is about 12 to 18 inches off the ground, pause, and then slowly lower your leg. Some people may struggle to achieve the full range of motion at first, but with time and practice, you can reach your goal.

3. Hamstring Stretch

The hamstring is the large muscle in the back of the leg, which also helps to support and bend the knee. To perform the hamstring stretch, lie on your back and loop a strap around your foot — an elastic exercise band would be ideal.

Now, lift your leg high until you feel a slight stretch on the back of your leg. Keep your leg elevated for 30 seconds and lower slowly.

4. Glute Lift

Your glutes help to aid balance and stability while walking. Even though they are far from the knee, strong glutes go a long way towards improving osteoarthritis symptoms.

To complete a glute lift, lie face down with a pillow under your stomach. Straighten your leg and squeeze your glutes to lift your heel a few inches off the ground, hold and release. Repeat this exercise about 30 times daily for best results.

5. Calf Stretch

The muscle on the back of your lower leg is the calf. Exercising the calf helps add flexibility to the foot and ankle, which helps absorb the impact of walking.

The calf stretch is performed by standing and facing a wall. Put your hands against the wall, lean forward, and slide one foot in front of the other. As you lean forward, feel the stretch and tension in your back foot above your heel.

Holding this stretch for 30 seconds will add much needed strength. Repeat this exercise three times on each leg.

These exercises for osteoarthritis of the knee may not eliminate all symptoms, but they can work wonders towards improving mobility and quality of life. The next trip to the mailbox may just be a little easier.