

your Health [MEDWATCH]



# KNEE PAIN?

Here's what might be causing it.

**Knees are vulnerable to a host of problems, many of them arthritis-related.** These complicated joints are made up of two big bones – the thigh (femur) and shin (tibia) bones – topped by your knee cap (patella). The ends of the bones are cushioned with cartilage – two C-shaped discs (menisci) act as shock absorbers between the bones. Orthopedic surgeon Geoffrey Westrich, MD, and rheumatologist Theodore Fields, MD, both at Hospital for Special Surgery in New York City, explain what can go wrong with your knees, and ways to treat the pain. –LINDA RATH

### RHEUMATOID ARTHRITIS (RA)

Tissue inside the joint lining (the synovium) becomes inflamed, causing pain and swelling. Over time, untreated inflammation can damage the bones as well as other parts of the body.

**TREATMENT:** RA usually affects many joints, so disease-modifying antirheumatic drugs (DMARDs), like methotrexate and biologics, are used. If the knee joint is the only or main joint involved, corticosteroid injections, OTC pain relievers and PT

### OSTEOARTHRITIS (OA)

A loss of protective cartilage causes bones to rub together, leading to stiffness and pain.

**TREATMENT:** Over-the-counter (OTC) pain relievers; cold therapy; weight loss if needed; low-impact exercise, such as swimming, walking and biking; physical therapy (PT) to strengthen knee muscles. Corticosteroid or hyaluronic acid injections into the joint may give temporary relief. If these measures fail, knee replacement is an option. Avoid arthroscopic surgery, Dr. Westrich cautions. "It does nothing to relieve arthritis pain."

### GOUT

A type of inflammatory arthritis in which excess uric acid crystals build up in joints, causing sudden, severe pain and swelling, often in the knee.

**TREATMENT:** Nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs), colchicine, oral or injected corticosteroids. To prevent future attacks: uric acid-lowering drugs; weight loss if needed; gout diet (avoid excess red meat, shellfish, alcohol)

### BURSITIS

Fluid-filled sacs (bursa) that cushion pressure points in your knee become painful and inflamed.

**TREATMENT:** Rest, ice, NSAIDs. May need PT to strengthen knee muscles or antibiotics for infection. Your doctor may drain the excess fluid.

### PSEUDOGOUT

Like gout, this form of arthritis causes severe pain and swelling, usually in your knees. Also called calcium pyrophosphate deposition disease (CPPD), it results from a buildup of calcium pyrophosphate crystals.

**TREATMENT:** NSAIDs, colchicine, oral or injected corticosteroids. Long-term oral colchicine for prevention

### TORN MENISCUS

Knee cartilage can tear from a sudden injury or degenerate over time. Symptoms can include pain, swelling and stiffness (which may be mistaken for arthritis)

**TREATMENT:** Rest, ice, compression, elevation (RICE), OTC pain relievers. PT to strengthen and stabilize the joint. For younger (athletes in their 20s) but not older adults, possible surgical repair

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