

## PHYSIOTHERAPY SERVICES

### OSTEOARTHRITIS OF THE KNEES

This leaflet is about osteoarthritis of the knees and what you can do to help yourself.

Your knee is like a hinge. Cartilage covers the ends of the bones, to allow smooth movement when you bend or straighten it.

Osteoarthritis is when the cartilage is gradually worn away with age or after injury, mainly at the points of greatest pressure. The two surfaces rub against each other - sometimes you can hear or feel it.

This can lead to pain, stiffness, loss of movement, swelling and deformity. It can lead to your knees giving way because the muscles around the joint can become weak.

### REMEMBER THE FOLLOWING POINTS:

**Standing:** Remember to straighten your knees fully when standing.

**Lying:** Avoid lying with your knees up, especially if you are confined to bed for any length of time.

**Feet:** Look after your feet. Wear sensible, well fitting, soft-soled shoes with low heels. Cushioned insoles can reduce the

impact of walking and minimise jarring of the joints. Slippers do NOT support your feet, so try not to wear them all day long.

## HOW CAN I HELP MYSELF?

### PAIN RELIEF

- **Heat** . this can be soothing and help decrease pain . ask for the leaflet on heat application.
- **Ice** . This can reduce swelling and pain. Ask for the leaflet about the use of ice.

**Discuss the use of painkillers and/or anti-inflammatory tablets with your GP or Pharmacist.**

### CONTROLLING THE SWELLING

- **Cold** – ask for the leaflet on ice treatment.
- **Anti-inflammatory gels** . see your pharmacist or GP for advice
- **Tubigrip Bandage** . for occasional use

### REDUCING STIFFNESS

- Try to avoid long periods of sitting. Aim to bend and stretch your legs a few times every half hour and just before you get up.

- Your physiotherapist may give you an exercise programme to reduce knee stiffness and strengthen the muscles which control your knees. Try this daily, starting gently at first.

## USEFUL HINTS

1. Know your limitations. Limit any activities which make your knees painful or swollen.
2. When walking upstairs, on kerbs or onto buses, put your best leg up first.
3. When coming downstairs, put your most painful leg down first.
4. Take care when walking on uneven ground, as this can aggravate your painful joints.
5. If getting out of a chair is difficult, try a higher chair or raise the seat with a firm cushion. If possible, use a chair with arms.
6. If getting out of bed is difficult, try rolling onto your side and pushing yourself up into sitting as you swing your legs over the side of the bed.
7. Avoid or limit carrying heavy loads, e.g. shopping, because the extra weight may strain your knees and back.
8. Moving your knees up and down in a warm bath can be beneficial. Swimming is often a good form of exercise, although vigorous breaststroke may be painful and you should therefore adapt your stroke if necessary.
9. Watch your weight. The more you weigh, the more your knees have to carry.
10. Walking is an excellent exercise for the body in general and especially for the leg muscles. Walk at a speed which does not produce increased pain or swelling.
11. If you are using a stick, place it on the ground at the same time as the affected leg. The stick should normally be held in the hand opposite the affected leg. It should have been measured correctly.