

No Such Thing as Bad Knees

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Millions of Americans are afraid to exercise because of knee pain, for two reasons – they think it will hurt or they think it will aggravate an old injury and cause more pain. But by conquering these fears and learning how to exercise safely, these individuals can reap the rewards of regular exercise and jump a huge psychological hurdle.

Here are three reasons why you can stop worrying that exercise will hurt your knees.

1. There is no such thing as “bad knees.” There is knee pain and weak knees, and both of these conditions can be addressed successfully by adjusting exercises. You do not have to be doing squats and lunges to strengthen your legs. Lying leg lifts will work your leg muscles effectively.

Don’t underestimate the benefit of doing exercises sitting in a chair. If you think about the exercise machines in the gym, with the exception of the Smith machine (squats with the bar), most of them have you in a sitting position when working your legs. Why not sit on a chair and do leg extensions?

Follow these easy instructions for the leg extension exercise:

- Sit on a chair with knees bent and feet on the floor (for more of a challenge sit on a balance ball)
- Lift one leg up to extend the leg out to a straight leg position
- Bring that leg back down and rest your foot on the floor
- Repeat the exercise 15 times on each leg

This exercise will work your leg without putting undo stress on your knees. You will feel the muscles working through out the entire range of motion.

2. It's not all about your knee. By strengthening the muscles surrounding your weak or injured knee, you can build a foundation that allows you to experiment safely with certain exercises. By strengthening the muscles surrounding your knee it will help to keep your knee cap in position. Strengthening these muscles will help to minimize any pain or discomfort.
3. If it hurts too much, you can stop! Many individuals find, however, that by pushing a bit past their comfort zone, they make incredible progress. First you need to determine whether it is pain or is it muscle soreness from working the muscle that you are feeling.

I do not believe in the saying "No pain no gain." But I do want my clients to feel some muscle soreness after their first workout. This soreness indicates that they have worked those muscles beyond their normal activity. The muscle becomes stronger when you have worked it to fatigue. That soreness generally goes away within a day or two.

As with any exercise program you should consult your physician before beginning. It may be beneficial to work with a personal trainer to learn the best exercises to strengthen the muscles without injury. A personal trainer will also help to push you beyond your comfort zone safely. It is our fear of getting hurt again that keeps us from moving forward in exercising trouble areas. Learn to do the right exercises and you are on your way to better mobility and fitness.

Holly Kouvo is an Aerobics and Fitness Association of America-certified personal trainer and aerobic instructor as well as a certified nutrition specialist. As president of Fitting Fitness In, Holly focuses on helping people who need to lose 100 pounds or more. She recently produced a video entitled "Total Body Workout...Just Easy on the Knees," the first in her Easy On™ series, which brings easy-on-the-knees exercises into people's homes. Contact her at 978-502-8781 or holly@fittingfitnessin.com.