

## KNEE PAIN & DISABILITY: ARE YOU AT RISK?

Many people suffer from bouts of knee pain at some point in their lives. For most, the pain is transient and will eventually resolve, but for others the pain is persistent and may become chronic, affecting their ability to perform functional activities such as climbing stairs, kneeling and squatting, not to mention hiking, running and bicycling.

Many jobs in industrial settings require low work such as kneeling, squatting or crouching. Prolonged exposure to such activities may be a precursor to knee pain. Employees may also be exposed to standing and walking on concrete and asphalt much of the day and may also be required to climb multiple stairs during each shift. Others are exposed to confined spaces that may require crawling on hard surfaces. Still others are climbing ladders or into and out of vehicles multiple times per day.

What may be done to prevent knee pain in employees who are frequently exposed to situations that may place added stress on their knees? What does your employer offer to help prevent knee injury and pain? What can you personally do to avoid or prevent knee pain?

### What's available?

There are several protective devices available on the market for your knees

- Traditional strap-on knee pads worn over pants during low work activities
- Built-in knee pads in overalls or jeans
- Cushioned kneeling pads are available in multiple sizes (including pocket size) and provide a safer surface for kneeling
- Knee Savers are wedge-shaped foam devices that strap on around the ankle and prevent the knees from going into full flexion during kneeling or low work activities.
- Cushioned insoles for work boots
- Custom orthotics may be beneficial to help correct ankle and foot posture that may contribute to knee pain. If your employer has a safety shoe allowance, some orthotics may be reimbursable



### What should I do?

- Begin your work shift with a dynamic warm-up routine
- Use common sense. If you must kneel to perform a task, protect your knees by using a kneeling pad. Change your position frequently. Take a break from the low work to stand up and move.
- Wear quality shoes or boots with good support and adequate built-in cushioning.
- Drink plenty of water. Aim for half your body weight in ounces per day, more if perspiring from exertion or heat exposure. Your knees (and all of your joints) love water because the fluid exchange in the joint supplies nutrients for the cartilage and moves the waste products out.
- Exercise regularly. Walk, walk, walk. If walking is not your thing, find an exercise you love and that you will commit to doing regularly as part of your lifestyle. There are many ways to get cardiovascular

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exercise which not only benefits the heart and lungs but also every tissue in the body, including the knees.

- Get plenty of rest. Our bodies are constantly rebuilding. New cells are replacing older, damaged cells. This process occurs mostly during the hours of sleep.
- Eat a diet that promotes healthy circulation of blood consisting of mostly whole foods such as unprocessed grains, fruits, seeds and vegetables.

### What should I avoid?

- Kneeling directly on unforgiving surfaces such as concrete, which never gives and never will.
- High impact exercise on concrete surfaces. Don't jump rope in your garage or play basketball on a concrete court.
- Cheap shoes. If your shoes don't provide proper support and cushioning, your knees may suffer as a result.
- Junk food. If it's junk, why would you want to eat it? Refined, processed junk foods and fatty foods tend to decrease circulation by clumping blood cells which then cannot enter the capillaries.
- Drinking soda pop, energy drinks, coffee, tea and alcohol which tend to dehydrate rather than hydrate.
- Tobacco products. They all interfere with healthy circulation.
- Shortchanging yourself on sleep. Not enough sleep may translate to tissue breakdown occurring faster than tissue rebuilding (think joint degeneration).

If your job involves performing a lot of low work, check with your employer about tools and techniques that are available for you at your workplace.

Written by Larry Davis, PT  
WorkWell OnSite Physical Therapist