



# Caring for your knee sprain/strain

The best person to manage your injury is you and this fact sheet discusses things you can do to get better more quickly.

Knee sprains and strains usually recover quickly, and most improve dramatically within the first few days or weeks. You can generally expect to be back to normal activities within one to six weeks (unless your health provider tells you otherwise). If you are not sure what you can and can't do, speak with your health provider.

Please note smoking, alcohol or other illicit substances do not assist your recovery.

## Managing the first 48 hours

For two days after your injury, use the RICE method. Start as soon as you can after you are injured.

- **Rest:** Take it easy and only move within your pain-free range.
- **Ice:** As soon as possible, apply ice or a frozen gel-pack wrapped in a damp towel to your injured knee. Keep doing this for 20 minutes every two hours. This helps control bleeding and pain, and reduces further damage.
- **Compression:** Firmly bandage your knee – all the way from five centimetres above to five centimetres below the joint. This helps to control swelling.
- **Elevation:** For as much of the time as you can, prop your leg up on a chair or cushion to keep it higher than the level of your heart. This will also help reduce swelling.

You also need to be aware of **HARM** factors so avoid **Heat, Alcohol, Running, Massage** in the first 48 hours. They increase swelling and may delay your recovery.

## Managing after 48 hours

After two days, it's important to try to walk normally – heel to toe. Try not to limp. You can now start activities that help to get your knee moving again, such as cycling or walking.

## Managing your pain

- For soft tissue injuries, you can expect your pain to settle down over a short period of time (days to weeks) as healing occurs.
- Using your leg and knee as normally as possible will help you get better. So, even though you may be in some pain, try to stay active.
- Pacing your activities can help, so have regular rest breaks and modify activity within pain levels.

- If you need pain relief a short course of medication such as paracetamol may help, otherwise you can consult your doctor or pharmacist for the appropriate type of pain relieving medication.
- If you're worried about your pain or it is not settling quickly, talk to your health provider.

## Resuming daily activities

- It helps if you try to get back to your usual daily activities as soon as possible, unless your health provider advises otherwise.
- Prolonged bed-rest delays recovery, and is not recommended.
- Regular activity such as walking or swimming will get your joints and muscles moving. Any usual exercise, as tolerated, is helpful and will assist your recovery.
- Increase your activities steadily and in stages. Set yourself goals that can be achieved over a week such as doing the housework, going out, doing gentle exercises and enjoying hobbies.
- Spread your activities throughout the day, and take time to rest between activities.
- Alternate easier activities with more physically demanding activities.
- Remember it is normal to have good days and not so good days.

## When to seek more help

Talk to your health provider if:

- you still have pain or swelling a week after your injury
- your knee pain or swelling gets worse when you walk
- you get numbness or tingling in your calf or foot
- you have trouble putting weight on your leg
- your knee gives way unexpectedly
- your knee locks up, so that you have difficulty straightening or bending it.

## Staying positive

- If you have a positive outlook, and expect that you will get better, this can help you achieve a faster recovery.
- Concentrate on things you can do, instead of things you can't.
- It is important that you stay in charge of your life and to remember most people recover quickly.
- If you become upset about your injury, it may help if you speak with a friend, family member or health provider.
- Keeping fit and healthy will help your injury to heal.

## Helping yourself at work

- Research shows that the sooner you resume all your usual activities, including work (either paid or unpaid) the sooner you'll get better, and the less likely it is that your injury will become a long term problem.
- Your health provider may recommend that you do different tasks from usual at work while you get better.
- Talk with your employer and health provider about ways you can return to work safely.
- Depending on your circumstances, an occupational therapist, physiotherapist, rehabilitation provider or other health provider may assist you to modify your work tasks for a safe return to work.
- Allow for regular changes in body position and movement, to minimise stiffness.
- Keep in touch with your workmates and your workplace. Participate in social activities. This can help you stay in touch with what's going on at work.

“Remember you don't have to be completely pain free to do things at home or to return to work.”

### Enquiries: 13 18 55

100 Waymouth St, Adelaide  
South Australia 5000  
Fax: (08) 8233 2990  
info@workcover.com  
www.workcover.com

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