



Preventive Health Specialist

Strong Knees

by Kate Hanley

A little bit of self-care goes a long way toward keeping this joint strong, stable, and pain-free



Whether it starts as a cracking sound when you first get out of bed or as a post-workout twinge of pain, the knees have a way of telling the truth about our age—especially for women. According to the National Center of Health Statistics, women account for two-thirds of the 400,000 knee replacements performed each year. Staying pain-free, says Jason Theodosakis, M.D., author of *The Arthritis Cure*, depends on having a solid prevention plan. “If people in their forties start thinking about preserving their joints, they’ll be much more likely to maintain healthy knee function for another 60 years.” We designed these exercises—with physical therapist Jim Johnson, author of *Treat Your Own Knees*, yoga teacher Sandy Blaine, and movement educator Eric Franklin—to help you strengthen and stretch the muscles surrounding your knees for better alignment and greater stability.

1 Balance Challenge

What it does Helps your body find true alignment, then strengthens the muscles responsible for maintaining it. For a greater challenge, repeat this exercise with your eyes closed. “When you close your eyes, your muscles have to work much harder to bring your joints into alignment,” says Blaine, author of *Yoga for Healthy Knees*.

How to do it Stand with your feet parallel, either together or 4 to 6 inches apart. Bring your hands to your hips and bend and lift your right knee, bringing your foot a few inches off the ground. Hold for 10 breaths. Repeat sequence on the other side.

BALANCE BENEFIT
Learning to balance strengthens virtually all the muscles of your feet, ankles, knees, and legs.



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2 Lateral Stretch

What it does Stretches the outer hip, glutes, and the muscles that run along the outside of the leg.

How to do it Lie on your left side with your right leg crossed over the left knee and your right foot flat on the floor. Using your left arm to support you, engage the upper body, pressing against the mat until you feel a gentle stretch in the hip. For a deeper stretch, use a blanket under your shin. Switch sides.

STRETCH BENEFIT Increasing the range of movement in your hips reduces knee strain.



3 Isometric Strengtheners

What it does Builds stronger quads, which support and stabilize the knee; you'll notice the difference after doing this exercise 3 days a week for 6 to 8 weeks.

How to do it Sitting on the floor, place a cushion under one knee and lean back on your hands. Lift the heel off the floor, then press down firmly on the cushion and hold for 3 to 5 seconds. Repeat 30 times, then switch legs.

STRENGTHENING BENEFIT Making the quads stronger helps to decrease the risk of knee osteoarthritis.



Knee TLC

Simple adjustments to your everyday routine can add up to healthier, stronger knees.

- + **Go barefoot.** This encourages foot and ankle muscles to stabilize the leg on their own.
- + **Check your soles.** If they're worn down unevenly, the resulting imbalance can potentially strain the knees. Be sure to replace shoes if they become too worn down.
- + **Walk up, ride down.** Climbing stairs strengthens the legs, but going down stairs can harm the knee joint. If you have knee issues, take the elevator or escalator down.
- + **Go low impact.** Run on a trail or treadmill instead of the sidewalk, switch to cross-country instead of downhill skiing, and play tennis on clay courts instead of hard courts.
- + **Try biking.** The cyclical rotation helps build the muscles and cartilage in the knees. Go for at least 30 minutes, and try for 2 to 3 times a week.
- + **Enlist a pro.** Improving your form in your chosen fitness activity reduces strain on your joints. Consider hiring a trainer for a few sessions.
- + **Prioritize happiness.** Once osteoarthritis develops, depression can put patients at a greater risk for disability.