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## 11 Exercises that Help Decrease Knee Pain

*Need Pain-Free Knees? Start Here!*

— By Jen Mueller, Certified Personal Trainer

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If your knees are giving you problems, and you feel like the Tin Man from "The Wizard of Oz" when getting out of bed, you're not alone. Nearly 50 million Americans feel the same way.

Knees are the most commonly injured joints in the body.

Considering that when you simply walk up stairs, the pressure across your knee joints is *four times* your body weight, it isn't surprising. Simple, everyday wear and tear can end up hurting your mobility.

But it's not too late. Like a rusty door hinge, with care and maintenance, you knees can be trouble free. Even if you already experience problems, exercising the muscles surrounding the knee joints—Quadriceps (front of thigh), Hamstrings (back of thigh), Abductor (outside thigh), and Adductor (inside thigh)—will help make your knees stronger and less susceptible to injury. Exercise keeps your joints from stiffening and provides needed support, making movement easier and reducing pain.

Here are some exercises you can do to both stretch and strengthen the knee area:

### STRETCHES

- Chair knee extension:** Sitting in a chair, rest your foot on another chair so the knee is slightly raised. Gently push the raised knee toward the floor using only [leg muscles](#). Hold for 5 - 10 seconds and release. Repeat 5 times on each leg.
- Heel slide knee extension:** Lie on your back, with left knee bent and left foot flat on floor. Slowly slide the left heel away from your body so both legs are parallel. Hold for 5-10 seconds, return to starting position. Repeat 5 times on each leg.
- Knee flexion:** Sitting in a chair, loop a long towel under your foot (resting on the floor). Gently pull on the towel with both hands to bend the knee, raising your foot 4 - 5 inches off the floor. Hold for 5 - 10



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### About The Author

#### Jen Mueller

Jen received her master's degree in health promotion and education from the University of Cincinnati. She is a certified personal trainer and enjoys running marathons. [See all of Jen's articles.](#)



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seconds, then release. Repeat 5 times on each leg.

4. **Hamstring stretch:** Standing, put one foot in front of you, toes up. With hands on the small of your back (or one hand holding a chair for balance), bend the opposite knee and hip (not your lower back), until you feel the [hamstrings stretch](#). The upper body comes forward at the hip. Hold for 5 -10 seconds, then release. Repeat 5 times on each leg.

## STRENGTH TRAINING

1. **Wall slide:** Leaning with your back against a wall, bend your knees 30°, sliding down the wall, then straighten up again. Move slowly and smoothly, using your hands on the wall for balance. Keep feet and legs parallel, and do not allow knees to go out over the toes. Repeat 5 -10 times.
2. **Bent-Leg Raises:** Sitting in a chair, straighten one leg in the air (without locking the knee). Hold for about one minute. Bend your knee to lower the leg about halfway to the floor. Hold for 30 seconds. Return to starting position. Work up to 4 reps on each leg.
3. **Straight-Leg Raises:** Sitting in a chair, rest your foot on another chair. Lift the foot a few inches off the chair while keeping your leg straight. Hold for 5 -10 seconds. Return to resting position. Repeat 5 -10 times. (Also work on increasing the time, up to 2-3 minutes if possible.)
4. **Abductor Raise:** Lie on your side, propped on one elbow. The leg on the floor bent, the other straight. Slowly lift the top leg, hold for 5 -10 seconds, then lower. (Ankle weights will increase the intensity). Do 1-3 sets with 12-15 repetitions each. Remember to rest in between sets.
5. **Hamstring Curl:** Stand with the front of your thighs against a surface (a table or wall). Flex one knee up as far as is comfortable. Hold for 5 - 10 seconds, then lower slowly. If possible, do not touch the floor between repetitions. (Ankle weights will increase the intensity.) Do 1-3 sets with 12-15 repetitions each. Remember to rest in between sets.
6. **Step-Ups:** Stand in front of a step, like a sturdy bench or stairs, about two feet high (or less if necessary). Step up onto the support, straighten your knees fully (without locking them) and step down. Maintain a steady pace. If you are comfortable with your balance, pump your arms while doing this exercise. Start with 1 minute, slowly building your time. Gets your heart pumping too!
7. **Stationary Bike:** Biking is a good way to increase strength and [range of motion](#). Make sure you have the right positioning of the legs. At the bottom of the pedal stroke, the bend in the knee should be 15 degrees. Start with 10 minutes and slowly increase your time.

Depending on your current level of activity and mobility, a good start is 3 stretching and 3 strengthening exercises, 3-4 times a week. [Stretching](#) can be (and should be) done everyday if possible to prevent stiffness and achy joints. These stretches can be done a few times a day if needed.

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