

THERAPEUTIC EDGE

Free Knee Arthritis Roadmap

A practical guide to help you understand pain, stiffness, swelling, strength, flare-ups, and how to stay active.



You do not need a perfect knee.

You need a repeatable plan your knee can recover from.

Pain • Stiffness • Swelling • Strength • Flare-ups • Staying active



START HERE

What this roadmap is for



Knee arthritis is rarely about finding one perfect exercise, one perfect image, or one perfect treatment. It is about understanding your pattern, adjusting when symptoms change, and building a repeatable plan your knee can recover from.

1

Understand your pattern

Notice what your pain, stiffness, swelling, walking tolerance, and activity response are telling you.

2

Adjust during flare-ups

Learn when to move forward, when to hold steady, and when to reduce the dose.

3

Build a repeatable plan

Use walking, strength work, mobility, and smart progression to help your knee feel more capable.

KEY

Best frame

You do not need to do everything. You need to do the right amount, consistently.

UNDERSTANDING KNEE ARTHRITIS

Knee arthritis is more than an X-ray

X-rays can help show structural changes, but they do not tell the whole story. Pain, stiffness, swelling, strength, walking tolerance, confidence, sleep, and your goals all matter when deciding what to do next.

A knee can look irritated on an image and still respond well to exercise and load management. A knee can also look mild on imaging and still feel very limiting.

1

Pain & stiffness

How intense are symptoms, and how long do they last?

2

Swelling

Does the knee puff up or stay irritated after activity?

3

Strength

Can your muscles support walking, stairs, and sit-to-stand?

4

Activity tolerance

What can you do now, and what happens the next day?

Treat the person, not just the picture.

WHAT USUALLY MATTERS

The four things that usually matter most



1

Pain and stiffness

What it may look like:

Pain with walking, stairs, or after sitting.

What to emphasize:

Gentle movement, activity pacing, and the right exercise dose.

2

Swelling and irritability

What it may look like:

The knee puffs up, feels warm, or stays angry into the next day.

What to emphasize:

Reduce the dose, keep easy motion, and calm things before building again.

3

Strength

What it may look like:

Sit-to-stand, stairs, hills, or getting up from low chairs feels hard or unstable.

What to emphasize:

Progressive strength work for the quads, hips, and calf.

4

Walking, stairs, and activity tolerance

What it may look like:

You can do something once, but you pay for it later.

What to emphasize:

Track your response and build capacity gradually.

These four areas often guide better decisions than pain alone.

DECISION RULE

Use the 24-hour response rule



The goal is not zero pain. The goal is a response your knee can recover from.

1

Green light

Symptoms stay mild, walking does not change much, and the knee settles by the next day.

What to do: Keep going or progress slightly.

2

Yellow light

Symptoms are more noticeable, the knee feels a bit stiff or puffy, but it settles within about 24 hours.

What to do: Hold steady or make a small adjustment.

3

Red light

Pain spikes, swelling clearly increases, you limp more, or the knee is still worse the next day.

What to do: Reduce the dose and calm things down before building again.

Useful question:

Did this activity help my knee feel more capable tomorrow, or did it create a flare I could not recover from?

FLARE-UP PLAN

What to do when your knee flares up

A flare-up does not mean you failed. It usually means the current dose was more than your knee could recover from.

1**Do not stop everything.**

Keep easy movement going. Complete rest usually makes stiffness and confidence worse.

2**Reduce the dose.**

Shorten the walk, lower resistance, reduce depth, or do fewer repetitions.

3**Keep easy motion.**

Gentle bending, straightening, and light walking often help the knee settle.

4**Use calming tools.**

Heat or ice, relative rest, and a simpler exercise day can help symptoms calm down.

5**Build back gradually.**

Once the knee settles, return to your plan in smaller steps.

Your reset goal

Make the next 24 hours feel more predictable. You are not trying to win one heroic day. You are trying to find a dose your knee can repeat.

If it is not settling

If the knee feels dramatically different or keeps worsening after backing off, check in with your care team.



CHOOSE YOUR STARTING POINT

Pick the pattern, then pick the plan

Do not try to fix everything at once. Choose the pattern that best matches your knee this week, then make one clear adjustment.

1

If stiffness is the main issue

Use short, frequent bouts of easy motion. Break up long sitting. Warm up before harder tasks.

Marker: first steps after sitting

2

If swelling is the main issue

Reduce total dose for 24-48 hours. Keep easy walking and motion. Build back slowly.

Marker: next-morning puffiness

3

If stairs or chairs feel weak

Prioritize sit-to-stand, step work, and quad/hip/calf strength at a repeatable dose.

Marker: sit-to-stand quality

4

If walking tolerance is limited

Use planned intervals. Stop before the limp builds. Add time gradually if the next day is acceptable.

Marker: minutes before symptoms change

The best plan is specific.

One pattern. One marker. One adjustment. Then watch the 24-hour response.

EXERCISE DIRECTION

Exercise that actually helps



The best exercise plan is one you can repeat, recover from, and build over time.

1

Mobility

Gentle range-of-motion work can help reduce stiffness and make daily movement easier.

2

Walking and aerobic work

Walking, cycling, or other low-impact cardio can help with confidence and overall capacity.

3

Strength

Progressive loading for the quads, hips, and calf is one of the most useful ways to build support around the knee.

4

Balance and control

Sit-to-stand, step work, and simple balance drills can improve confidence and function.

Best frame

Mild discomfort during exercise does not automatically mean harm. The key question is how your knee responds later that day and the next day.

Build around the foundation



Helpful treatments can support the plan, but they should not replace the plan. Start with what improves movement, tolerance, and confidence.

Foundation

Education, therapeutic exercise, activity pacing, and weight management when appropriate.

1

Helpful symptom relief

- Topical NSAIDs can help when appropriate.
- Heat or ice may help calm symptoms.
- A brace, cane, or support can help if it clearly improves movement or reduces limping.

2

Discuss with your clinician

- Oral medications need to fit your health history.
- Corticosteroid injections may provide short-term relief.
- Hyaluronic acid is not routinely recommended in several major guidelines.

3

Surgery conversation

- Worth discussing when quality of life stays very limited despite a real conservative-care trial.
- Keep building if you are still improving or have clear room to progress.

Practical filter

Does this option help me move better, tolerate more, or build the plan I can repeat?

WEEKLY SNAPSHOT

Track what your knee is telling you



Use this quick snapshot to notice patterns, guide decisions, and adjust your plan with confidence.

1	Pain with activity (0-10)	0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ no pain worst pain
2	Morning stiffness (minutes)	minutes
3	Swelling today	☐ less ☐ same ☐ more
4	Best functional marker this week	☐ walking ☐ stairs ☐ sit-to-stand ☐ exercise
5	Next-day response after exercise	☐ better ☐ similar ☐ worse
6	My adjustment for next week	☐ continue ☐ increase ☐ hold ☐ reduce

Notes: _____



Next step

Use this roadmap, then build your plan at mytherapeuticedge.com. Start with your Knee Arthritis resources and keep the plan practical, repeatable, and adjustable.

Evidence-informed by major osteoarthritis guidance, including NICE, AAOS, and ACR/Arthritis Foundation recommendations.