

Osteoarthritis in the Knees

The main thing to remember when working with an injury is that circulation is what heals. Movements to increase circulation—while watching the tracking patterns carefully—in addition to creating space and stabilizing and strengthening the muscles around the joint are the intention. In synovial joints, movement and/or isometric strengthening is what increases the synovial fluid, almost like WD-40 for the joint. An important thing to remember with the knee joint is that there are no muscles in the joint itself—so if there is pain in the knee joint a ligament or tendon is probably having undue strain put on it. Motto for Yoga - No pain, no gain!

The following are great poses for increasing circulation and working with the tracking patterns as well as strengthening around the joint:

Knee Circulation

Extending and flexing the knee and hip to increase circulation and work with the biomechanics of movement.



The starting position is apanasana, with the hands interlaced around one knee to hold that knee into the chest.



On inhale extend the leg straight out, about an inch off of the floor, belly button drawn to spine to protect low back.



On exhale raise leg up, heel toward ceiling, toes toward face to increase the stretch to the back of the leg.



On inhale lower leg back down parallel to the floor, about an inch off (I am in mid-movement here.)



On exhale bring leg back to starting position.

Repeat 6-8 times before moving to the next side.



It is fine if the leg does not completely straighten, work within the parameters of the practitioner's flexibility.



Having the opposite foot on the floor is an option for people with low back pain, as this more strongly blocks the rotation of the pelvis than holding that knee at the chest.



Alignment and watching the tracking pattern of the joints of the leg is very important, to improve the biomechanics of movement as opposed to reinforcing negative movement patterns. Notice here that the leg is coming straight out of the socket and the knee and toes are facing the ceiling.



This is my normal release valve pattern, especially with my right hip which has a history of joint displacement.



This is awkward for my hip, however some people naturally rotate inwardly. Watch for these patterns, and also encourage your students to pay attention to their movement patterns, to move deliberately with an awareness of their alignment - in class and in life!



If getting on the floor is not possible, knee extensions can be done in the chair. On inhale, extend knee and draw toes toward face.



On exhale, bend knee and lift knee, to get the hip flexors involved as well. Still watch the tracking patterns! Repeat 6-8 times.

Chair - Ardha Utkatasana

This is a great pose for strengthening the legs and joints of the lower body. I also included this pose since isometric holds will release synovial fluid in the joints. This is great for both the knees and the hips. I did not include full chair due to the back bending quality - if there is osteoarthritis in the lumbar spine strong back bends can irritate it.



Watch knee and hip alignment! If they tend to roll the knees together, place a block between the thighs.

Knee Therapy



This knee extension exercise has double benefits - it strengthens the musculature around the knee and opens the knee joint to create more space, ie. reducing compression between the upper and lower leg bones.

Fold a blanket in half three times, then roll it up like a noodle. Place it directly under the back of the knee joint, with the foot flat on the wall. Practitioner stays seated and can use their hands on the floor behind them for support. On exhale, press the heel into the wall and the back of the knee down into the blanket strongly.

Repeat 10-12 times. Before switching sides get up and walk around the room to feel the effect. The knee feels so much more spacious and light!