

# IS RUNNING BAD FOR YOUR KNEES?

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“Aren’t you worried that running is ruining your knees?” It’s a question runners often hear from well-meaning friends. The myth that you can only run so many kilometres in a life time before your knees inevitably wear out and require replacing is not true. While a car may require replacement parts after a certain amount of use, the human body has the ability to self-repair and actually gets stronger when we exercise an adequate amount.

The knee joint is crucial for our mobility. It is a complex joint involving several cartilage lined bones, tendons, ligaments and about a dozen muscles for stability and control. Exercise can strengthen all of the components of the knees –including the cartilage- which can actually help combat them ‘wearing out’. It’s more often when muscle strength is inadequate that problems start to occur and this is more likely in inactive individuals.



*Sitting may be worse for your knees than running*

## Not exercising is ruining your knees (and probably your health)

Modern science is now a champion of the concept that ‘movement is

medicine’. Inactivity is linked to a large number of ‘lifestyle diseases’ such as Type 2 Diabetes, obesity, heart disease and more. To improve cardiovascular health and maintain a healthy body weight, the Department of Health now recommends that adults perform about 30 minutes of moderate intensity exercise on all or most days of the week (plus 2 days of resistance exercise, and consume a balanced diet).

## NEED NEW KNEES?

Around 1 in 5 Australians have osteoarthritis (OA) which is the leading reason for patients needing knee replacement surgery. While the myth would suggest that most of these people would be runners, this isn’t supported by any research. A recent study showed that OA is no more prevalent in older runners than non-runners of the same age, but the runners generally had a healthier body weight and level of fitness. Body weight has a major bearing on your risk of arthritis, and knee osteoarthritis is extremely common in overweight and obese individuals. However it was found that exercise, not weight loss was more effective at reducing knee pain.

## FIT BUT STILL GETTING INJURED?

It is possible to have a healthy bodyweight and still get knee OA or other ‘wear and tear’ injuries. The alignment of your thigh and shin bones can result in increased pressure and wear on certain parts of knee cartilage, where people with ‘knock knees’ or ‘bow legs’ have a higher risk. Additionally, individuals with poor muscle conditioning (e.g. due to inactivity), tight muscles or excessive flexibility may be more likely to injure their knees. A strength and conditioning program from a physiotherapist or podiatrist may prove useful for addressing these issues. The correct pair of shoes (and where necessary, an orthotic insert) can also assist in alleviating knee pain.

Thankfully science has advanced our understanding of biomechanics (the way our bodies move), and with appropriate footwear and a considered training plan, most people should be able to run or perform other moderate intensity exercise with minimal injuries to their knees.

If you are having problems with your knees, or would like an assessment of your running technique and footwear, contact the intraining Running Injury Clinic on (07) 3367 3088.



*Minimise your chance of knee pain by having a thorough assessment of your leg alignment, running technique and shoes.*



*Medial compartment knee osteoarthritis characterised by a loss of cartilage and joint narrowing (red arrows) and bone spurs (blue arrow)*