

Dislocated knee cap (patella)

Patient information

A dislocated knee cap (patella) is a common knee injury. It is often caused by a blow, or an awkward twist of your knee. The knee cap (patella) normally sits at the front of the knee, it glides within a groove in the thigh bone (femur) when you bend or straighten your leg.

When the kneecap (patella) dislocates, it comes out of the groove and the tissues around it can be torn or stretched. This leaflet provides general information and advice after your knee injury. There are some simple exercises that should help you.

What should you do after your knee cap dislocates?

Once your knee cap is back in the correct place it can be swollen and painful, you should reduce the pain and swelling and do some simple exercises.

Rest: After a rest period of 48 hours start gentle exercises, this will accelerate the healing process. Limit your walking for the first 48 hours. It is very important with this type of injury to keep your knee moving to prevent stiffness.

Brace/splint: You may be provided with a splint to make your knee more comfortable. This can be removed overnight, for personal care needs and for gentle exercises. You may need to use the brace for 2 weeks.

Ice: Apply ice to the injured area, this you may help to reduce the pain. Apply the ice for 20 minutes every 2 hours (use an ice pack or a bag of frozen peas wrapped in a damp towel, to protect your skin).

Medication: Painkillers are important to aid your recovery, take them regularly until you have normal movement and strength.

Elevate: While applying the ice you can elevate your leg, this will help to reduce the swelling. This is most effective if your leg is higher than your heart.

Crutch or walking stick: If you have been advised or your knee is very painful and swollen you may benefit from using a crutch. This may help you to walk without limping. If you are using only one crutch it is important you hold it in the **opposite** hand of your injured knee.

Exercise: It is important you do exercises to regain the movement and strength of your knee. Your quadriceps muscle helps to keep the knee cap in the correct position. You should also continue to exercise the rest of the body, this can improve your motivation and increase the blood supply to the affected area.

Driving: To drive you need to be able to walk without crutches and safely be able to perform an emergency stop. For more information refer to www.dvla.gov.uk

Returning to work: This depends on your type of work. Most employers recommend that staff should not be at work while using crutches.

Sport: To return to sport you will need to exercise to regain the full movement and strength of your leg. You also need to be confident at doing all the activities involved in your sport e.g. for football you would need to be able to run, change direction and jump etc. The success can depend on your willingness to do the simple exercises that regain the strength and movement of your leg.

What should you avoid after dislocating your knee cap?

Initially you should avoid twisting your knee especially during the activity you were doing when it dislocated. Do not allow your leg to become stiff or weaker.

What is the outlook?

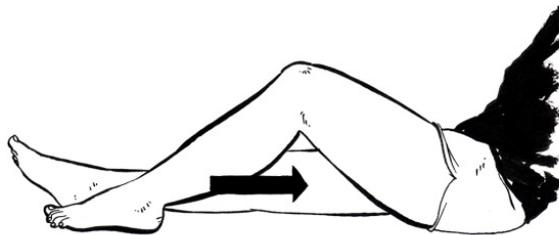
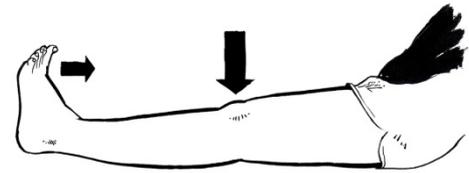
Most patients with a dislocated patella recover well. You do need to work hard doing the simple exercises to regain the movement and strength. You will need to continue your exercises until you have full movement in your knee and full strength in your quadriceps, hamstrings (thigh) and calf muscles. You can compare the injured leg to the uninjured leg. You will have to gradually build up your exercises. It can take 6-8 weeks before you can return to your usual sports or activities.

Ongoing problems with your knee

If you have achieved full strength and movement of your knee and you continue to have pain, instability or you are unable to return to your usual activities you should contact your physiotherapist or doctor.

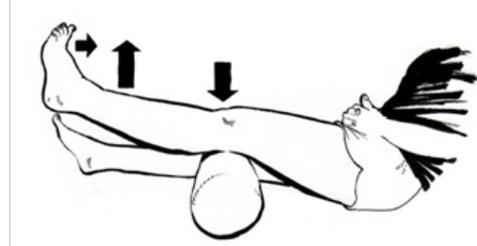
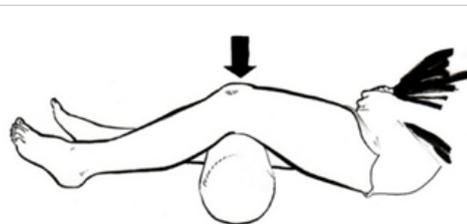
Exercises to regain movement

- 1. Knee Push Downs [\(Video link\)](#)**
 Pull your ankle towards you and push your knees against the bed or floor tensing your thigh muscles. Hold for 5 seconds before relaxing. Complete the exercise until the thigh muscle fatigues.
- 2. Active Knee Flexion**
 Resting on your bed or sitting in a chair, bend the affected leg as far as possible, hold for a few seconds and relax. Complete for 5 minutes.



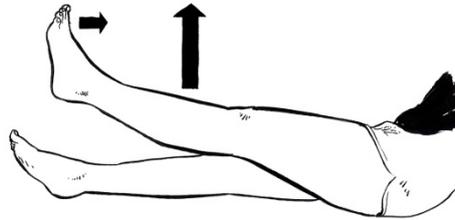
Exercises to increase the strength in your quadriceps (thigh) muscle

- 1. Inner range quadriceps strengthening [\(Video link\)](#)**
 Lying on your back, place a firm cushion or rolled up towel under your affected leg. Lift the lower part of your leg so that your heel lifts off the bed. Hold for 5 seconds before relaxing. Complete the exercise until the thigh muscle fatigues.



Exercises to increase the strength in your quadriceps (thigh) muscle (cont.)**2. Straight Leg Raise [\(Video link\)](#)**

Straighten your affected leg and pull your toes towards you and lift your leg to about 15cm above the bed, hold for a second then relax. Complete the exercise until the thigh muscle fatigues.

**3. Advanced Quadriceps Strengthening [\(Video link\)](#)**

Stand with the foot of the affected leg up on a step. This foot stays on the step throughout this exercise. Step up onto the step with your other foot and then step off with this leg.



More information can be found at [Web link](#)

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Please contact the Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) if you require this leaflet in a different format, or would like to feedback your experience of the hospital. Email ruh-tr.pals@nhs.net or telephone 01225 825656 / 826319.