

Outdoor health tips from the Posse:

Don't catch a case of hiker's knee

Knee pain is something that catches up with everyone at one time or another. If you exercise and do plenty of athletic activity, you will eventually get complaints from your knees. The person, who does not exercise and eats all the time and just gains weight, will eventually get knee problems.

Hikers can suffer from an array of knee problems. First, consider that the term “hiker” covers a wide selection of outdoor people. Backpackers, day hikers, joggers, thru-hikers, dog walkers, hunters and fisher people all hike a certain amount in pursuit of their passion. All of these people are prime candidates for knee problems.

In this day and age of micro-surgery, lasers and complete joint replacement, bad or bunged up knees are not the “life sentence” they once were, unless you are like me and avoid doctors and surgery at all costs. I believe that the original equipment is what should stay with you and not some after-market replacement, no matter how close to OEM it might be.

Pain in your knees is a warning shot across the bow. Pay attention to the pain and deal with it at the first sign and you will extend your hiking years. Ignore the pain, or take the “work through it” attitude and you are likely to not only make matters worse, but run the risk of permanent damage.

Let's say your knees hurt whenever you make a trek downhill. The main reason your knees hurt when heading down the mountain is because they are under significantly more stress than when on

flat or uphill grades. As you plow down the hill, one step at a time, the leading knee gets to absorb all the impact of not just your bodyweight, but also the added force of you going downhill. Add to the equation the extra weight of a backpack, and you have the trifecta of potential knee pain.

An article published in Knee Surgery, Sports Traumatology, and Arthroscopy stated that the compressive force between the tibia and femur (best known as your knee joint) is between seven and eight times your bodyweight when going downhill. If you are a 200 pounder like me, that equates to a bull moose. When put in those terms, I can understand why my knees ache when I go up and down the hills.

Some people are more at risk for knee problems than others. Overweight people, prior knee problems and knee injuries, and lots of trail miles all make certain people have more problems, and sooner, than others. There are folks whose knee caps don't track correctly or who suffer from an imbalance in leg muscles who will be at a higher risk for knee pain.

If you feel a persistent ache under your kneecap, it may mean your knee is not tracking properly. It could also mean that the cartilage is worn down. Hiking downhill or sitting in a canoe can make injuries like this much worse.

Correction for such a knee pain could be as simple as special insoles for your shoes and some physical therapy to strengthen and stretch the muscles around the knee. If you experience this pain, treat with cold packs and take an over-the-counter anti-inflam-



Anyone who jogs, hikes, backpacks, and hunts, runs the risk of developing hiker's knee. (Mark Rackay/Special to the Montrose Daily Press)

matory. As soon as possible, see the doctor and let him decide which treatment is best for you.

When you have a shooting pain above or below the kneecap while on the hike, it is most likely tendinitis. Tendinitis is caused by overwork and over-use. A hike that has extended mileage, with a heavy load, is usually the culprit.

At the first sign of pain, take a rest and ice the affected area. On the trail, pop a couple anti-inflammatory pills and lighten your load and slow the pace. Again, if the pain persists or reoccurs, see the doc for a treatment.

When the worst happens, and you take a tumble leaving you with pain around the entire knee, a more drastic approach should be taken. There exists the possibility you may have torn the anterior cruciate ligament (ACL) that is the knee's

main stabilizer.

ACL injuries are more common in basketball players than hikers, but any fall that twists or hyper extends the knee can cause it. If your knee tends to buckle when you try to stand, that is a pretty good sign you have an ACL injury.

If you are on the trail, and must walk out, use trekking poles as crutches. You can fashion a couple crutches from available branches in the woods. Keep your knee bent and place the weight on your toes. Do not wrap the knee as it could cause an increase in the swelling. For a suspected ACL injury, best head to the doctor's office directly from the trailhead.

Prevention is a good step in knee injuries. Exercises that strengthen the muscles around the knee, calf muscles and leg muscles will all help prevent

knee injuries. For me, keeping the weight down and doing my stretches has helped keep the pains at bay.

I try and keep good footwear at the forefront. Purchase well fitting footwear that provides good support. Talk to your doc about custom insoles if you have experienced any prior problems. Take care of your knees and they will take care of you. We are going to need them on the trail.●

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