

Corewell Health Medical Group Orthopedic Tips



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Runner's knee – all about patellofemoral pain

Have you experienced nagging pain at the front of your knee during or after a run? A common ailment amongst runners is patellofemoral pain syndrome, also referred to as “runner’s knee.”

Runner’s knee manifests as pain around or behind the kneecap, particularly with activities that load a bent knee, such as squatting, stair climbing, running, or kneeling. This can be caused by several factors. Overuse/overload is often involved, such as with increases in mileage or training intensity. Muscle imbalances and malalignment also commonly play a role.

To diagnose this issue, your doctor will perform a thorough physical exam and often basic imaging such as an X-Ray to rule out other diagnoses.

Fortunately, there are many tools to treat runner’s knee.

- A lower body strengthening program is essential. Exercises that isolate the quadriceps and hip abductors are key.
- Scaling back on mileage or intensity of training may be necessary to allow your knee to recover. Incorporating regular low-impact activities such as walking, swimming, biking, or yoga can help maintain fitness while giving your knee a break.
- A physical therapist can perform a running gait analysis to look for running form errors and optimize where needed. A simple intervention includes increasing your step rate (cadence). A commonly cited number to aim for is 180 steps per minute; however, even increasing your baseline step rate by 5-10% can encourage a softer landing, subsequently reducing loading and pain in the knee.
- Use of orthotics can raise a flattened arch and improve alignment further up at the knee.
- External support of the knee with specialized tape or a brace can stabilize the kneecap with activity and reduce friction at the joint.
- Medications or injections may be considered in your treatment plan if symptoms are not improving.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding an injury or pain, please reach out to one of our experienced sports medicine physicians at Corewell Health West Orthopedics at (616) 267-8860. You can find more information about our orthopedic programs and providers near you at corewellhealth.org.
