



Getting A Leg Up On Knee Pain

Jennifer Grounds, B. Sc. (PT), MCPA

The recent warm weather has brought out droves of runners that are typical of Vancouver in the springtime. The sea wall is crowded with them on Sunday mornings regardless of the weather, each with their own agenda in mind. For some, general fitness is the name of the game, for others the Sun Run is a lofty goal. More experienced runners may have aspirations of the Vancouver half or even full marathon.

One of the most common causes of knee pain in runners is patello-femoral syndrome. Patello-femoral knee pain is simply pain felt between the patella (knee cap) and the femur (thigh bone). Simply put, the kneecap develops a poor movement pattern so that the underlying cartilage is irritated. The pain may be dull or sharp in nature. It is usually localized to the front part of the knee, and may worsen with sporting activities, descending stairs, or sitting with the knees bent for a prolonged period of time such as in a movie theatre. There may also be slight swelling under or around the knee cap and the kneecap may make a clicking or grinding noise with movement.

There are several factors that may predispose an individual to patello-femoral pain. These include muscle weakness particularly in the gluts and medial quadriceps (VMO), and tightness of the lateral quadriceps, iliotibial band, hamstrings and calf muscles. There are structural causes as well, such as poor alignment at the hips, knees and ankles.

Treatment of acute patello-femoral pain initially includes rest, ice, anti-inflammatory medication and taping to control the tracking of the patella. Poor alignment at the knee, ankle or foot may also have to be addressed with an orthotic. For some, an ongoing persistent case of patello-femoral pain may be improved with the use of a patello-femoral stabilization brace. Regardless, a home exercise program consisting of specific stretching and strengthening exercises for problem areas is important for ongoing management and long-term relief.

If you are training for a specific event and don't want to give up your dream due to an unexpected case of patello-femoral pain, don't despair. While undergoing your rehabilitation, you can stay in shape by swimming or aqua running, and you will likely be back on track within a few weeks. Good luck with your running goals and see you on the sea wall!