



Osteoarthritis: Are Knee Braces Beneficial?

Susel Garcia, PT
Physical Therapist
Isanti Physical Therapy

Osteoarthritis (OA) in the knees can be very debilitating and may lead to decreased quality of life depending on its severity. Knee braces are one way people try to cope with their pain, but do they really work? First, finding the correct type of brace is vital. Braces typically assist with improving stability and swelling, but can also make mechanical advantages to the knee joint for more functional movement. There are many knee braces including prophylactic braces which assist in preventing injuries, functional braces which provide stability, rehabilitative braces which limit motion after surgery, and unloader braces which decrease stress on one compartment of the knee joint. Because of its unloading and weight shifting capabilities, some studies have shown that unloader braces provide the best pain relief for people suffering from OA in only one part of their knee, but not both. Current evidence has also shown a decrease in pain during weight bearing activities and improved walking distances with the use of unloader braces. Other factors affecting the potential benefits of knee braces for OA is correct fitting, age, severity of cartilage damage, and length of wearing time. After knee braces are prescribed and properly fitted by a professional, it is typically recommended people not constantly depend on the brace, to allow for natural strengthening during functional activities like walking and stair climbing. Although knee braces may provide temporary pain relief for some, it is not the entire answer for everyone suffering from OA. Participating in complementary treatments, like well designed physical therapy programs, regular exercise, dietary changes, and activity modifications, all assist in improving pain, swelling, stiffness, and overall function.