

Aching joints are common, but you can...

# Keep your knees healthy

by Michael O'Shea

**I**F YOU ARE AMONG THE 19 million Americans who saw a doctor for knee pain last year, you had some high-profile company. Both golfer Tiger Woods and two-time Super Bowl MVP Tom Brady underwent knee surgery in 2008. The knee is the largest joint in the body and very complex. Here are some tips to help keep your knees healthy so you don't become one of the 20% of Americans over 60 with significant knee pain.

**■ WATCH YOUR WEIGHT.** Research shows that carrying even a little extra weight triples your chances of developing arthritis. Every pound you carry puts an average of five pounds of added stress on your knees when you move, so being just 10 pounds overweight is like having 50 extra pounds of pressure on your joints. Research also has shown, however, that for a woman of average height, losing as little as 11 pounds may cut the risk of osteoarthritis of the knee by up to 50%.

**■ EXERCISE.** Motion is lotion for your knees. Strengthening the front and back muscles (quadriceps and hamstrings, respectively) of the thighs



Tiger Woods had surgery after playing (and winning) the U.S. Open on a bum knee; Tom Brady (top) was sidelined for an entire season with knee injuries.

can help prevent knee trouble—especially in women, who are five to seven times more likely to suffer a torn anterior cruciate ligament (ACL), which is among the most serious knee problems. One way to reduce your risk of such an injury is to practice jumping and landing on a slightly bent knee. Walking is good to help keep your weight down, but it won't build the thigh muscle you need to stabilize your knees. Aim to strength-train your legs two to three times a week to build and keep from losing muscle mass.

**■ PACE YOURSELF.** Always warm up before you exercise, and choose your workouts wisely. Know your limits. Give yourself time to get in shape, and

don't try to do too much too soon. Follow the 10% rule: Never increase the duration or intensity of your exercise or activity by more than 10% in a week. Train for at least two months before beginning stressful activities such as skiing or running in a race. Strength, flexibility, aerobic, and core exercises will help prevent knee and other injuries.

## Even pro athletes suffer knee problems

### ■ DON'T WAIT TOO LONG TO SEE A DOCTOR.

“With new technologies like MRI scans and arthroscopy, we can diagnose and treat knee problems quicker, easier, and better,” says Dr. Nicholas DiNubile, an orthopedic surgeon and a consultant to the Pennsylvania Ballet and to several pro athletes. “Fortunately, many knee patients often need just physical therapy and home exercises to treat their conditions.” You won't know until you get checked out, though, so err on the side of caution.

## Trends in Treatment

New and improved physical-therapy treatments are making patients pain-free sooner.

**Low-level laser therapy.** This treatment uses certain wavelengths of light at prescribed frequencies and intensities to help relieve pain and inflammation.

**InterX.** Many pro sports teams, including the Dallas Cowboys and the Chicago Bulls, use this new handheld device, which electrically stimulates the affected area, encouraging faster healing.

**Pool therapy.** Water's buoyancy reduces the load of your body weight on your knees, so if you're worried about putting too much stress on your joints when you work out, try exercising in water first. Warm therapy pools improve circulation and help loosen up injured areas. With the use of a flotation aid, you can run in place in the deep end for a good nonweight-bearing workout to help maintain your cardio fitness while also rehabbing your injury.