Take a Load Off
You Can Still Be Active While Protecting Your Knees
By Kelly James-Enger, ACE-CPT

What do you do when an injury or surgery gets in the way of your regular workout routine? First, don’t give up on exercise! If you’ve injured your knee, for instance—and maybe had surgery on it as well—the key is to find non-aggravating exercises that promote healing and still help maintain your level of fitness.

The primary question you’ll want to consider is what your doctor (or physical therapist) has recommended post-injury. In some cases, you may be able to walk slowly for short periods of time. In others, you may have to substitute weight-bearing exercise with swimming, bicycling or something else with very light resistance. Check with your healthcare provider to find out what other types of heart-strengthening cardio are best for you.

Regardless of what exercise you choose, be sure to pay attention to your body’s cues. If your knee starts to hurt or ache or you experience discomfort of any kind, cease activity immediately. Icing the knee (again, ask your doctor) may help give you relief from discomfort.

In the meantime, upper-body exercises can help you maintain fitness while resting your knee joint. As you heal, you can start incorporating lower-body moves like squats and lunges back into your routine.
Chest Fly (Target: chest)

A. Lie on a weight bench (or on the floor) with dumbbells in your hands, hands above your chest, knuckles facing each other, and your feet under your hips. You should have a slight bend in your arms.

B. Open your arms to draw your elbows toward the ground. Stop when your elbows are even with your shoulders (or reach the floor) and squeeze your chest to bring your knuckles back together. Try to do this 8 to 15 times.

Bent Over One-Armed Row (Target: back and biceps)

A. Hinge forward at the waist until your torso is almost parallel to the ground. Keeping your abdominal muscles engaged, hold dumbbells in both of your hands with knuckles facing the sides of your calves.

B. Bend your left arm and “row” it up toward your hip to make a 90-degree angle with your elbow. Pause briefly before returning to the original position. Repeat the move, rowing your right arm up toward your hip—that’s one rep. Aim for 8 to 15 of these.

Prone Triceps Extension (Target: triceps/back of upper arms)

A. Lie on a weight bench (or on the floor) with dumbbells in your hands, arms straight up over your shoulders.

B. Engage your abdominals and, keeping your upper arms stationary, bend your elbows to bring the dumbbells toward your forehead. Pause briefly, and then return to your original position. Try to do this 8 to 15 times.
21s (Target: biceps/front of upper arms)

A. Stand with your feet under your hips, dumbbells at your sides, knuckles facing forward.

B. Bend your arms to bring the dumbbells to the height of your navel, making a 90-degree angle. Now, return to your original position. Try to do this 7 times. (This is a lower-half biceps curl.)

C. Next, bring the dumbbells up to the height of your navel (your starting position).

D. Bend your arms to bring them up to your shoulders. Then return to navel height. Try to do this 7 times. (That's an upper-half biceps curl.)

E. Finally, bring the dumbbells back to the original position.

F. Curl them all the way up to your shoulders (a full biceps curl) Bring them back to your original position. Aim to do this full biceps curl 7 times.
Crunch Pulses  
(Target: abdominals)

A. Lie on your back, with your knees bent, feet on the floor next to your bottom. With your hands by your hips, palms facing down and raised several inches from the floor, lift your head and shoulders up off the ground. That’s your starting position.

B. Pulse (meaning make small movements), as you move your fingers about an inch or so closer to your feet. Pulse 8 to 15 times.

Side Raises  
(Target: shoulders)

A. Stand with your feet under your hips, dumbbells at your sides.

B. Keeping a slight bend in your arms, lift your arms away from your sides until your elbows reach shoulder height. Pause briefly and then return to your starting position. Try to do this 8 to 15 times.

The information presented is educational and may not suit an individual’s particular health situation. Always check with your doctor or healthcare provider before beginning a new program.

Kelly James-Enger has been an ACE-certified personal trainer since 2007 and is the author of books including Small Changes, Big Results: A 12-Week Action Plan to a Better Life (with Ellie Krieger, RD). She’s also a successful “loser,” having maintained a 45-pound weight loss for 25 years.