Joint Strategies

How to protect your knees from damage

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Quick question: What do noted athletes Tiger Woods, Tom Brady, Chipper Jones and Michael Redd have in common? Answer: All suffered knee injuries that threatened their careers.

But professional athletes aren't the only ones who experience knee injuries and pain. Nearly 18 million Americans visit their doctors each year because they suffer from pain in the body's largest, most complex joint, according to the Cleveland Clinic's Orthopaedic & Rheumatologic Institute.

Although you can't avoid some knee problems, the good news is there are ways to minimize injury to these joints. Walking and stretching the muscles in front and back of your thighs can help warm up knee joints.

In addition, certain exercises, such as climbing stairs, riding a stationary bike or lifting weights, can strengthen leg muscles and support hardworking knees. But experts at the National Institute of Arthritis and Musculoskeletal and Skin Diseases also suggest we use common sense when working out.

This means avoiding sudden changes in the intensity of exercise; wearing shoes that fit and support the feet; and maintaining a healthy weight to avoid putting extra pressure on your knees.

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