

MENISCUS INJURY PHASE 1

Physiotherapy Guide and Conservative Treatment – Initial Phase



◆ INTRODUCTION

If you are reading this guide, you are probably experiencing knee pain that is limiting daily activities such as walking, climbing stairs, squatting, turning on your leg, or exercising.

The first thing we want to tell you is this:

👉 **You are not alone, and this is a very common condition.**

Many people receive terms such as:

- meniscus injury
- meniscal degeneration
- meniscopathy
- meniscal irritation
- meniscal pain

as if they all meant exactly the same thing.

👉 **Although there are some differences between these situations, they often share similar symptoms and may benefit from common principles of conservative rehabilitation.**

The menisci are fibrocartilaginous structures located between the femur and the tibia.

Their main functions are:

- ✅ distribute load across the knee joint
- ✅ improve joint stability
- ✅ absorb impact
- ✅ contribute to normal knee movement

When the meniscus becomes irritated or injured, symptoms may include:

- pain while walking
- discomfort when twisting the knee
- pain when squatting
- stiffness
- discomfort when going up or down stairs
- occasional sensations of catching, locking, or discomfort during certain movements

👉 **In many cases, especially when following a conservative treatment approach, the initial goal is not to force the knee, but to help the tissues gradually regain their ability to tolerate movement and load.**

◆ **WHY IS THIS PROGRAM DIVIDED INTO PHASES?**

Recovery from a meniscal injury often benefits from a gradual progression.

During the early stages, certain movements or loads may be too demanding for a knee that is still sensitive.

For this reason, we have divided the rehabilitation process into different phases, allowing the joint to progressively adapt to movement and physical demands.

Each phase has specific objectives and prepares the knee for the next stage of recovery.

♦ WHY DO WE USE OPEN KINETIC CHAIN EXERCISES IN THE INITIAL PHASE?

During this first phase, most exercises are performed in an **open kinetic chain**.

👉 This means that the foot remains free and does not support body weight.

This approach allows mobility and muscle activation to be trained in a controlled manner while reducing compressive forces on the femorotibial joint and the meniscus.

As the knee becomes more tolerant to movement and loading, it will be possible to progress towards more functional exercises in the following phases of the program.

👉 **The goal of this initial phase is to restore mobility, improve muscle activation, and prepare the knee for later stages of rehabilitation.**

Although symptoms can be frustrating, in many cases this is not a situation that requires complete immobilization, but rather one that may benefit from a gradual and well-managed exposure to movement.

This guide has been created to help you begin a physiotherapy process that is:

- ✓ simple
 - ✓ progressive
 - ✓ safe
 - ✓ based on controlled movement and gradual loading
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♦ IMPORTANT CONCEPT

One of the most common mistakes is:

- ✗ completely avoiding movement
- ✗ returning too quickly to demanding activities

👉 **The goal of this phase is to gradually restore mobility and muscle activation while preparing the knee for the next stages of rehabilitation.**

♦ HOW TO USE THIS PROGRAM

👉 **This is not a random list of exercises.**

It is a physiotherapy protocol designed to progressively improve mobility, function, and tolerance to movement.

Perform the exercises calmly, respect your symptoms, and always maintain control of the movement.

EXERCISES

◆ **FREQUENCY**

👉 Perform the program **2–3 times per week for approximately 3 weeks.**

- ✅ slow and controlled execution
 - ✅ movement quality before quantity
 - ✅ consistency is the key to progress
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⚠ **BEFORE YOU START**

👉 Work within a **mild to moderate level of discomfort**, not severe pain, but also not necessarily in the complete absence of symptoms.

A slight discomfort during exercise can be normal and may be part of the recovery process.

✗ Avoid a significant increase in symptoms.

👉 If this occurs, temporarily reduce the intensity or volume of the exercises.

📈 **Improvement is usually gradual and requires time, repetition, and appropriate load management.**

1 ISOMETRIC LEG EXTENSION

Position

Sit on a chair.

You may use an **ankle weight** or a **resistance band** to progressively increase resistance as tolerated.

Execution

Perform **4 sets in total**:



👉 The first 2 sets consist of fully extending the knee and holding the contraction using an isometric technique for 20–40 seconds.



👉 The final 2 sets are performed by working only through the last 30° of knee extension, again holding the contraction isometrically for 20–40 seconds.

Rest **30–45 seconds** between sets.

Sets

4 total sets

Why is this exercise important?

This exercise helps improve **quadriceps activation and force production capacity**.

The final degrees of knee extension are particularly important for restoring active knee control during daily activities and preparing the joint for later stages of rehabilitation.

2 ECCENTRIC LEG CURL



Position

Lie face down on your stomach.

You may perform the exercise with an **ankle weight** or without additional resistance depending on your current level.

Execution

Bend both knees simultaneously until approximately **90° of knee flexion**.

From this position, slowly return to the starting position, performing the lowering phase over **4–5 seconds**.

👉 Maintain control throughout the entire lowering phase.

Sets

3 sets of 10–15 repetitions

Why is this exercise important?

The hamstring muscles contribute to the **dynamic stability of the knee joint**.

Eccentric training (the lowering phase) helps improve the tissues' ability to tolerate load and enhances movement control.

3 KNEE EXTENSION AGAINST A FITBALL

<https://youtube.com/shorts/YtxBF5PCb70>

Position

Sit on a chair.

Place a **fitball** or a thick cushion between the wall and the front of your ankle or the top of your foot.

Execution

Push the fitball against the wall by extending your knee in a strong and relatively fast manner.

👉 Powerful but controlled movement.

👉 Return slowly and under control to the starting position.

Sets

2–3 sets of 10–15 repetitions

Why is this exercise important?

Controlled speed helps stimulate **force production** and improve muscle activation.

This helps develop stronger muscles around the knee, improving the joint's ability to tolerate load and movement.

4 KNEE FLEXION AGAINST A FITBALL

<https://youtube.com/shorts/kJ73vmNoXGU>

Position

Lie on your back.

Place a **fitball** or a thick cushion between your heels and your buttocks.

Execution

Press the ball by bringing your heels towards your buttocks in a strong and explosive manner.

Return to the starting position by extending your knees over the ball or cushion.

👉 Maintain a relatively dynamic and controlled rhythm throughout the entire set.

Sets

2–3 sets of 10–15 repetitions

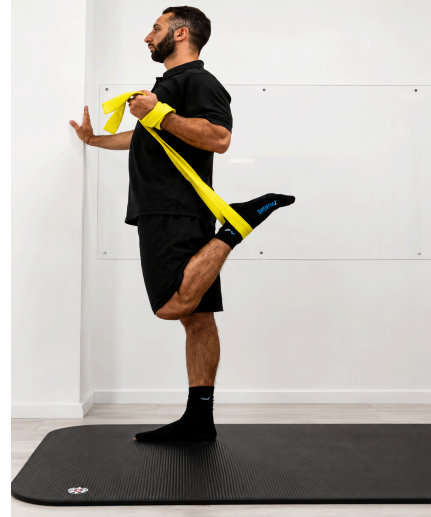
Why is this exercise important?

This exercise helps improve the **strength and activation capacity of the muscles at the back of the leg**.

Stronger muscles can contribute to better knee stability and movement control during daily activities.

5 QUADRICEPS AND HAMSTRING STRETCHING

QUADRICEPS STRETCH



Position

Stand upright with one hand supported against a wall for balance and use a **belt or strap** around your ankle with the opposite hand.

Execution

Bend your knee using the belt to bring your heel towards your buttocks until you feel a stretch in the front of your thigh.

Hold the position for **20–30 seconds**.

Sets

6–8 repetitions of 20–30 seconds each

Why is this exercise important?

Adequate quadriceps mobility and flexibility can help promote better knee mechanics and complement the strengthening exercises performed throughout the program.

HAMSTRING STRETCH



Position

Lie on your back with one leg resting on the floor.

Place a **belt or strap** around the sole of the opposite foot.

Execution

Using your hands, gently pull your knee towards your chest.

Then slowly straighten the knee with the assistance of the belt until you feel a stretch behind the knee, near the **popliteal area**.

Hold the position for **20–30 seconds**.

Sets

6–8 repetitions of 20–30 seconds each

Why is this exercise important?

Adequate mobility and flexibility of the distal hamstring tendons can help promote better knee mechanics and complement the strengthening exercises performed throughout the program.

◆ FINAL MESSAGE

If you have reached this point, you have already taken an important step:

👉 **You have started actively working to improve the strength and control of your knee.**

During this first phase, we have focused primarily on strengthening the main muscles surrounding the joint, especially the **quadriceps** and **hamstrings**, using exercises designed to minimize compressive forces on the meniscus.

Remember:

✅ There is no need to rush.

✅ It is not necessary to force the movement.

✅ The body adapts progressively to load.

📈 The most important thing is not that symptoms disappear immediately, but that you progressively notice:

- better knee control
- greater feelings of stability
- improved tolerance to movement
- increased confidence during daily activities

👉 **Consistency and proper exercise execution are essential for achieving results.**

◆ WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?

This phase represents only the first step of the rehabilitation process.

Once your knee tolerates movement and loading more effectively, you can progress to a second phase where we will focus on more specific aspects such as:

✅ inner and outer thigh musculature

✅ gluteal muscles and hip control

✅ semi-closed kinetic chain exercises

✅ proprioception and balance training

✓ progressive preparation for more functional activities

Each phase prepares the knee for the next, allowing for a safer and more efficient progression.

👉 Return to the information page and download **Phase 2**.

Information Page:

<https://physiocarehub.eu/meniscus-injury-physiotherapy-guide-and-conservative-treatment/>

◆ SUPPORT

If you have any questions or need assistance:

✉ support@physiocarehub.eu

👉 You do not have to go through this alone.

We are here to help.

Antonio

