

Run Without Knee Pain

A beginner's guide to running pain-free — built from real coaching, including clients with osteoarthritis and meniscus injuries.

Knee pain is the #1 reason beginners stop running. The good news: for most people it's a **load and technique** problem, not a "your knees can't run" problem. Here's how I keep clients running comfortably — even ones who arrived with knee diagnoses.

1. Your muscles are the shock absorbers — build them

Weak glutes and calves force the knee joint to absorb impact it was never meant to. Two short strength sessions a week change everything:

- **Glute bridges** — 3 × 15 (drive through the heels, squeeze at the top)
- **Wall sits** — 3 × 30-45 sec
- **Calf raises** — 3 × 15 (both legs, then progress to single-leg)
- **Side-lying leg raises & clamshells** — 3 × 12 each side (hip stability)
- **Step-downs** — 3 × 8 slow reps per leg, once pain-free

2. Fix the two technique cues that matter most

- **Cadence:** take shorter, quicker steps — aim for **170-180 steps per minute**. Longer strides create a heavy heel-strike that hammers the knee. (Tip: run to a 180-BPM playlist.)
- **Soft feet:** imagine running quietly, "on eggshells," landing under your hips — not reaching out in front.

3. Manage load — increase slowly

Do not add more than ~**10% distance per week**. Use the walk-run method to start (see my free 4-Week Starter Plan). Alternate running days with rest or low-impact cardio (cycling, swimming, elliptical) so tissue can recover.

4. Know your pain "traffic lights"

- **Green (okay):** a dull, mild ache that eases within an hour and doesn't worsen day to day.
- **Amber (adjust):** ache that lingers next morning — cut distance, add a rest day, check your shoes.
- **Red (stop & seek advice):** sharp, stabbing, or one-sided pain, swelling, or a knee that "locks" or gives way.

Surfaces & shoes: favour treadmill, track, or flat grass early on; replace running shoes every ~600–800 km. Small changes, big difference.

The bottom line

Strong glutes + quick soft steps + patient loading = comfortable running for the long haul. If you have a diagnosed knee condition, don't guess — a plan built around *your* joint (which is exactly what I do) lets you progress safely instead of starting and stopping.

Knee history and want to run? Book a free consult at trainwithjoby.com.



Prepared by Joby Paul

NASM-USA Certified Personal Trainer & Nutrition Coach · Fitnation Sports Hub

Educational guidance only — not medical advice. See a physician or physiotherapist for any diagnosed injury or persistent pain.