**Runner’s knees**

Runner’s knees, also known as patella-femoral pain, is a condition which is common in long distance runners and refers to the erosion of cartilage beneath the kneecap. Eventually, the cartilage becomes so thin that the kneecap does not move over the cartilage smoothly; this often results in a cracking noise.

**Causes of runner’s knees**

Runner’s knees can be caused by several different activities and conditions; these include overtraining, poor footwear and poor alignment of the kneecap; this becomes altered when the cartilage starts to wear down. The position of the kneecap can also be affected by a lack of strength in the quadriceps muscles.

**Symptoms of runner’s knees**

Common symptoms include pain and swelling underneath and at the sides of the kneecap. Often when the knee bends, a crunching noise can be heard. Pain usually becomes heightened during physical activity, especially if it involves climbing or running uphill.

**Treating runner’s knees**

This condition is commonly treated with a combination of rest, light exercises and medication. Ice will also help to reduce inflammation. Exercises should be carried out during recovery, but they should not put pressure on the knee; activities such as squatting should not be undertaken. It may be advisable to wear taping on the knee or a knee support to offer extra protection during exercise; surgery should be considered only as a last resort.

**Preventing runner’s knee**

The most important preventive measures are a thorough warm up and cool down; this will help to get the muscles warm and the joints loose and will reduce the possibility of an injury. It is also extremely important to wear supportive, well-fitting footwear. Athletes should allow the knee time to recover between training sessions; this may involve doing an activity which doesn’t put pressure on the knees such as swimming between intensive running sessions.