Patient 1

Sharon is a 55 year old office worker who has had problems with both knees for about 2 years, first noticed during a walking holiday when she couldn’t keep up with the group because of pain. She ended up skipping some activities and regretted going at all. Since then, she has stopped walking for pleasure and doesn’t do much exercise. Her right knee is a bit painful most of the time and swells occasionally, whilst her left one is bearable most of the time but has flared up this week. She was advised to take paracetamol but doesn’t like the idea of taking pills to mask the pain.

Sharon has no medical problems and no joint pain or stiffness elsewhere. The knee pain doesn’t interfere with sleep and her joints feel better when she first gets up, so resting definitely helps. She works hard all week and goes out with friends and family some evenings but spends quite a lot of time watching TV or reading with her feet up. Her weight seems to be increasing, which concerns her a bit but she thinks it is mainly due to her time of life. A friend, who is older but more active and had a hip replacement, told her she needed to see someone and get some help for her joints and that’s why she is here. She doubts that you can do anything but maybe an X-ray would be a good idea and she supposes she will just have to wait until it is bad enough for a new knee.

Patient 2

Paul, aged 62, was a bus driver but had to take early retirement after he developed a heart problem and had to have an operation on his coronary arteries. He is well now, has stopped smoking and generally takes good care of himself. He is still quite overweight and knows that getting more active would probably help but is a bit worried about overdoing it because of his previous heart problem and he doesn’t think his joints are up to it.

He is really here because of his joints. His back has played up for years and he thinks this is because of his job. For months now, he has been getting pain in his left hip and thigh when he is walking but is generally gets better if he sits down for a bit. Bending is getting more difficult and he is ashamed that he now has to get his wife to help him put on socks and tie his shoe laces – he used to be a keen dancer and should be able to do it still at his age but look how stiff his legs are. Can you do anything to help?

Patient 3

Jean is a 67 year old retired nurse who is normally very active, volunteering in her community and walking and swimming most weeks. She is generally healthy and her only medical problem was a breast lump removed when she was about 50. It turned out to be a breast cancer but had been completely removed and she just had hormone treatment for 5 years and was told all was clear, so no more follow-up was needed.

Over the past couple of months, she has started to have some pain and stiffness in both hips and legs, worse on the right, which doesn’t restrict her too much. Occasional ibuprofen helps. The pain doesn’t disturb her sleep but she tends to be a bit stiff and slow in the mornings until she can get going and have a hot shower. Walking a long way tends to make it worse but she is doing less walking because of the bad weather. Jean hasn’t any joint problems elsewhere but her shoulders and neck seem a bit stiff at times; she had a bit of a neck problem when she was working but hadn’t thought about it since retiring.