

[A Complete Guide to Knee Wraps](#)

Most of us take for granted how much we rely on our knees. From everyday movements such as climbing stairs to brutal powerlifting workouts, our knees take some serious punishment. One of the best ways you can support your workouts is by giving a helping hand to your knees – or in this case, a supportive wrap.

Knee wraps are an essential piece of exercise equipment. They are especially useful during heavy lifting workouts such as powerlifting and Strongman.

Not only can knee wraps get you in the habit of better form and execution, but they can also support your performance when you have a fully loaded barbell on your back.

Let's take a closer look at knee wraps, how they're different from knee sleeves, and what to look for when buying a pair.

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What are Knee Wraps?

A knee wrap is a long piece of elastic material – usually 80 inches long and 3 inches wide – that is placed on the bottom, top, and across the front of the knee.

You'll find that knee wraps are similar to the elastic and durable material that is used to make wrist wraps.

The purpose of knee wraps is to support your athletic performance and decrease your risk of injury during heavy lifting movements. Squats are the most common example of an exercise where knee wraps are recommended.

Easy to adjust according to your body type, knee wraps follow a spiral pattern until they are tight and your movement is restricted. The limit in joint motion helps with strength and stability, ensuring you can lift more weight without worrying about falling or getting stuck at the bottom (isometric) portion of the lift.

There are more benefits of knee wraps, but we'll discuss those more below.

Types of Knee Wraps

There are two types of knee wrap that you'll most commonly find in stores. We'll also discuss a close cousin to the knee wrap: the knee sleeve.

Traditional Knee Wrap

Your standard knee wrap is just a long piece of durable material with tapered ends and strong stitching. You'll commonly find knee wraps between 72 inches and 82 inches. As you'll find with our knee wraps, we prefer an 80-inch length, which is long enough for beginners and most veteran lifters.

There's a bit of a learning curve with a classic knee wrap as you need to know how to properly wrap your knees. This can make it intimidating for newcomers to powerlifting or squatting. We recommend having someone wrap you the first few times, explaining what they are doing in the process so you can learn.

Hook and Loop Knee Wrap

If you'd rather skip the learning curve of knee wraps, we recommend a hook and loop knee wrap.

This type of knee wrap is just like a traditional wrap with the added benefit of a Velcro-based locking system. We highly recommend this type of wrap for anyone who is lifting alone, is new to wrapping, or wants that added level of security.

The hook and loop system is one of the most popular types of knee wraps because it ensures the wrap won't slip or roll down during your lift. Can you imagine squatting 500 pounds only to have your wrap slide down in the middle of your lift? Simply wrap to the desired compression and secure your fit for worry-free lifting.

The hook and loop (Velcro) knee wrap is the type that we offer as it's equally ideal for weightlifting newcomers as well as long-time athletes.

Knee Sleeve

Knee sleeves are not the same as a traditional knee wrap but they are closely related. While a knee wrap is a long piece of durable elastic that you have to wrap yourself, a knee sleeve is a tight pre-fitted neoprene material – the same material you’ll find in wetsuits.

We want to mention knee sleeves here because they provide many of the same benefits as knee wraps although they are designed for different types of workouts.

For example, knee sleeves are ideal for CrossFit where support is essential, but flexibility is required. More on the difference between knee wraps and knee sleeves below.

Knee Wraps vs. Knee Sleeves: What’s the Difference?

It’s easy to confuse the two as both are pieces of fitness equipment that support your knees but there are key differences between knee wraps vs. knee sleeves.

Flexibility

Knee wraps offer a radically different level of flexibility for the user when compared to knee sleeves.

Knee sleeves are a soft and flexible piece of material that allows for full range of motion while placing an effective amount of compression on the joint.

This compression is enough to increase blood flow but not restrict your movement. Sprints, jumping, and other plyometric-based movements are all within your toolbox.

Knee wraps, on the other hand, are stiff and restrict movement. This is why you wouldn’t use a knee wrap during a CrossFit workout, for example. A knee wrap is not suited for any type of exercise that demands quick motion and high levels of flexibility.

However, the restrictive nature of knee wraps is a strength during exercises like the barbell back squat, especially when you’re trying to hit a new personal record (PR).

Level of Support

Continuing with the point above, you’ll find that the overall level of support is different in knee wraps vs. knee sleeves.

While you could perform a new one-repetition maximum with a knee sleeve, it would be more appropriate to use a knee wrap, especially if you’re using multiple 45-pound plates on each side of the barbell.

Knee sleeves are better suited for cross training or bodybuilding workouts where there's an emphasis on muscle fatigue and hypertrophy.

User Friendliness

Hands down, knee sleeves are easier to use. All you have to do is pull them up and over your knee. Make sure they are comfy, and you're finished.

As we discussed above, with knee wraps, there is a bit of a learning curve if you're using the traditional wraps. Even with the hook and loop system, you'll need a minute or two to get yourself ready to lift.

Activity Type

Knee wraps and knee sleeves lend themselves to different activities and workouts.

Knee wraps would be ideal for any activity where you need to restrict the motion in your joints to maximize power and strength. Powerlifting and Strongman are two workouts where knee wraps are almost required.

Knee sleeves can help your performance during more traditional workouts such as bodybuilding or cardio classes. They are also great for plyometrics. Your performance in workouts such as CrossFit and sprints can benefit from knee sleeves. Athletes should also use knee sleeves during training and games.

Benefits of Knee Wraps

Knee wraps offer a variety of fitness-focused benefits that can take your performance to the next level while supporting recovery.

Supports Heavy Lifting

The biggest appeal of knee wraps is their ability to help with heavy lifting. The best way to demonstrate the benefit of knee wraps for weightlifting is by taking a look at the squat.

During the eccentric portion of the squat, the knee wrap will tighten. Before you reach the isometric portion of the lift, a giant amount of elastic energy builds, helping you spring upward. It's this extra boost that allows you to push heavier weights during a training session or meet.

Improves Performance

Continuing with the point above, knee wraps improve your performance in two key ways:

First, elastic energy builds during the lowering phase of an exercise. Once you enter the concentric portion of the lift, that extra energy helps you return to the starting position.

Second, since your knee is tightly wrapped, the range of motion in your joint is limited. You don't have to worry about overextension. Instead, the limited joint movement supports your strength output.

But here's the catch for performance and heavy lifting: You must maintain proper form. Some users will report that they feel thrown off by the knee wraps. Almost like they have to fight to get into the proper starting form. This could be an issue of aggressively tight knee wrapping but most likely, it's the result of having to readjust to performing an exercise like the squat with the knee wraps.

We highly recommend performing lighter sets in the beginning with the knee wraps. Meanwhile, have a spotter check your form. Your spotter can cue you in when your form changes. The result is that you become more comfortable with the knee wraps and you can begin to increase the weight.

Reduces Risk of Injury

Some experts suggest that knee wraps reduce stress on the tendon that connects the quadriceps to the patella. Normally, as you squat, the tendon pulls on the patella. When wearing knee wraps, the tension placed on this tendon is reduced, helping to reduce your risk for a torn muscle or tendon.

The same word of caution applies here as well: You must make sure that you're performing the squat correctly while wearing the knee wraps.

Enhances Post-Workout Recovery

Some fitness experts suggest that knee wraps can enhance your post-workout recovery by promoting blood flow and reducing pressure on connective tissue during the workout.

Currently, there are no scientific studies that support this idea but you will find numerous anecdotal reports in the forums of weightlifting and powerlifting websites.

When to Use Knee Wraps

You're sold on knee wraps but maybe you're not sure when you need to wrap your knees vs. when you can use a knee sleeve. We would highly recommend using knee wraps for the following activities:

Powerlifting

If you plan on seriously pursuing powerlifting workouts, knee wraps aren't a polite suggestion, they are a requirement. Powerlifting training only focuses on three movements but you can use knee wraps for two of them.

Even if you're a beginner to weightlifting, making the investment in knee wraps now will help you get used to them before you start throwing around big weights.

Strongman

All of the powerlifting exercises – bench press, deadlift, and squat – are commonly used during Strongman training. Therefore, knee wraps are highly recommended for any Strongman trainees.

Heavy-Focused Weightlifting

Are you a weightlifter or bodybuilder who has reached a plateau? Are you considering seriously increasing the amount of weight you're pushing? For experienced lifters who plan to increase the amount of weight they lift, investing in a solid and strong pair of knee wraps is the way to go.

How-to Put-on Knee Wraps

As we mentioned earlier in the article, wrapping your knees might take a few attempts as you get used to doing it. Here's a breakdown of how to put on knee wraps.

- Make sure that the wrap is tight and taut before you begin. Do not allow the wrap to become loose as you are moving.
- Also, fully lock out your knee as you wrap.
- Place the end of the knee wrap below your knee on the shin.
- Wrap it behind your knee and as you bring it across the front of your knee, move upward. You'll create a "X".
- Again, be sure to maintain tension. Do not allow the wrap to become loose.
- Continue wrapping in an upward spiral fashion.
- Once you get to your fourth spiral, bring the wrap to the bottom across your knee. Loop it behind your knee then bring it up above your knee. You will have a large "X" on the front of your knee.
- If you are out of slack, tie and tuck in the wrap.
- If you have more slack, you can continue wrapping in a spiral fashion until you have just enough to tie and tuck.

Note on Knee Wrap Tightness

Much like wrist wraps, the extent of the tightness is going to be both a personal preference and suggested amount. You'll find some lifters who wrap to the point of discoloration in the skin. While you don't want to cut off circulation, you do want a nice and tight wrap.

Think of tightness on a scale of 1 to 10. If you're a beginner to knee wraps, you can begin with a 6 in tightness, but your goal is to get used to an 8 or 9.

Adjusting to knee wrap tightness can take several months. Take your time with it, adjusting as you become more comfortable.

Above all, you want a tight knee wrap but not so much that it negatively impacts your performance.

What to Look for When Buying Knee Wraps

Before you begin shopping for knee wraps, it's important to familiarize yourself with what to look for in an elite-quality pair.

Length

In general, you'll find that most commercial knee wraps fall between 72 to 82 inches in length. Iron Bull Strength knee wraps sit comfortably at 80 inches. Even most veteran lifters don't need more than this. But if you have massive tree trunk legs, there are wraps that are longer.

Wrap length aligns with the amount of support that is provided. The longer the wrap, the more times you can wrap your knee. However, there is a distinct point when you've wrapped too many times. You'll know because your squat performance is negatively impacted.

User Friendliness

Knee wrapping is something of an art especially if you're going to a powerlifting meet. Traditional knee wraps that require you to properly tie and tuck the end of the wrap might be too complicated for beginners.

If you're not experienced with knee wrapping, the hook and loop type of knee wrap is your best bet.

With that said, it can't hurt to purchase a pair of each. First, it's always good to have a backup pair. Second, you should learn how to wrap if you're serious about making powerlifting your go-to type of workout.

Durability

Your knee wraps are going to be put through the ringer every time you put them on. There should be no doubt in your mind about if they'll make it through the workout. Opt for a durable knee wrap – one that is made from heavy-duty elastic nylon. We also highly recommend a knee wrap that has double stitching. (Psst. Our knee wraps have both of these features. Just saying.)

Longevity

Spending a few extra bucks is always worth it when it comes to gym equipment. Knee wraps shouldn't fall apart or start to show signs of wear after a few workouts. You want something that is going to last longer than you do during a tough workout.

As mentioned above, go with elastic nylon and double stitching knee wraps for optimal longevity.

Activity Type

We touched on this above, but knee wraps and knee sleeves are ideal in different activities and workouts. Here's a list of common workouts and the type of knee wrap that might be ideal for that activity:

- **Powerlifting:** Knee Wrap
- **CrossFit:** Knee Sleeve
- **Bodybuilding:** Knee Sleeve
- **Strongman:** Knee Wrap
- **Weight Loss-Focused:** Knee Sleeve
- **One-Rep Max Training:** Knee Wraps
- **Weekend Sports** (e.g., flag football): Knee Sleeves

Where Can I Buy Knee Wraps?

Check out the Iron Bull Strength collection and go the extra mile for your knees.

Knee Wraps: Protect your knees and lift more weight with our premium knee wraps. These knee wraps are made with elastic nylon and they are double stitched, ensuring long-lasting performance. Featuring a hook and loop Velcro system, you don't have to worry about the wraps slipping or falling down during a lift.

Knee Sleeves: Made with a tough neoprene material, the Iron Bull Strength knee sleeves provide maximum support, compression, and stability for all types of high-performance workouts. Whether you're cross training, weightlifting, or bodybuilding, our 3-D design provides a contoured fit for perfect joint compression and warmth with optimal breathability and comfort.

FAQ – Frequently Asked Questions about Knee Wraps

1. Will knee wraps negatively impact my lifting form?

When used correctly, knee wraps should not alter your exercise form in a negative way. With that said, some studies suggest that knee wraps can set the stage for the body to change the mechanical performance of a squat, increasing the risk of injury to the knee. This is why knowing how to squat – from start to finish – is essential.

Knowing what proper form and execution looks like BEFORE wrapping will ensure you don't fall prey to bad form. If you're new to squatting or heavy lifting, get a personal trainer and focus on mastering form and correcting strength imbalances before using knee wraps and heavy weight.

2. I have recurring issues with my knee – Should I wear a knee wrap?

Those with prior knee injuries should not use knee wraps; instead, buy a knee brace.

3. How often should I wash my knee wraps?

It depends on how intense your workouts are. If your wraps are covered in sweat and chalk after every session, then you should probably give them a light wash after every workout.

The last thing you want to do is throw them in a dark and damp hamper with your other gym clothes. This is a breeding ground for bacteria. Your wraps will start to stink from doing this.

While it is possible to wash them with your clothes on a light wash cycle, we recommend handwashing and air drying to extend the life of the wraps.

White vinegar is also recommended to naturally kill bacteria.

4. Will my knee wraps eventually stretch out and become too loose?

Not at all. Unlike knee sleeves, which tend to stretch out over time, knee wraps won't become loose from use.

5. Can I wear my knee wraps for the entire workout?

No, we wouldn't recommend this. Knee wraps are a tool to support you during a specific moment in your workout. In this case, when you're trying to set a new personal record while using heavy weight. Wearing knee wraps during your warm-up, for example, would compromise your warm-up performance. Use them only when you need to.

Worry-Free Performance with Knee Wraps

Don't hesitate to let us know if you have any questions about knee wraps including sizes, material differences, and locking systems.

If you're ready to suit up for your next powerlifting PR, head on over to our store to get your next favorite pair of knee wraps.

References

1. Lake JP, Carden PJ, Shorter KA. Wearing knee wraps affects mechanical output and performance characteristics of back squat exercise. *J Strength Cond Res.* 2012;26(10):2844-2849. doi:10.1519/JSC.0b013e3182429840.