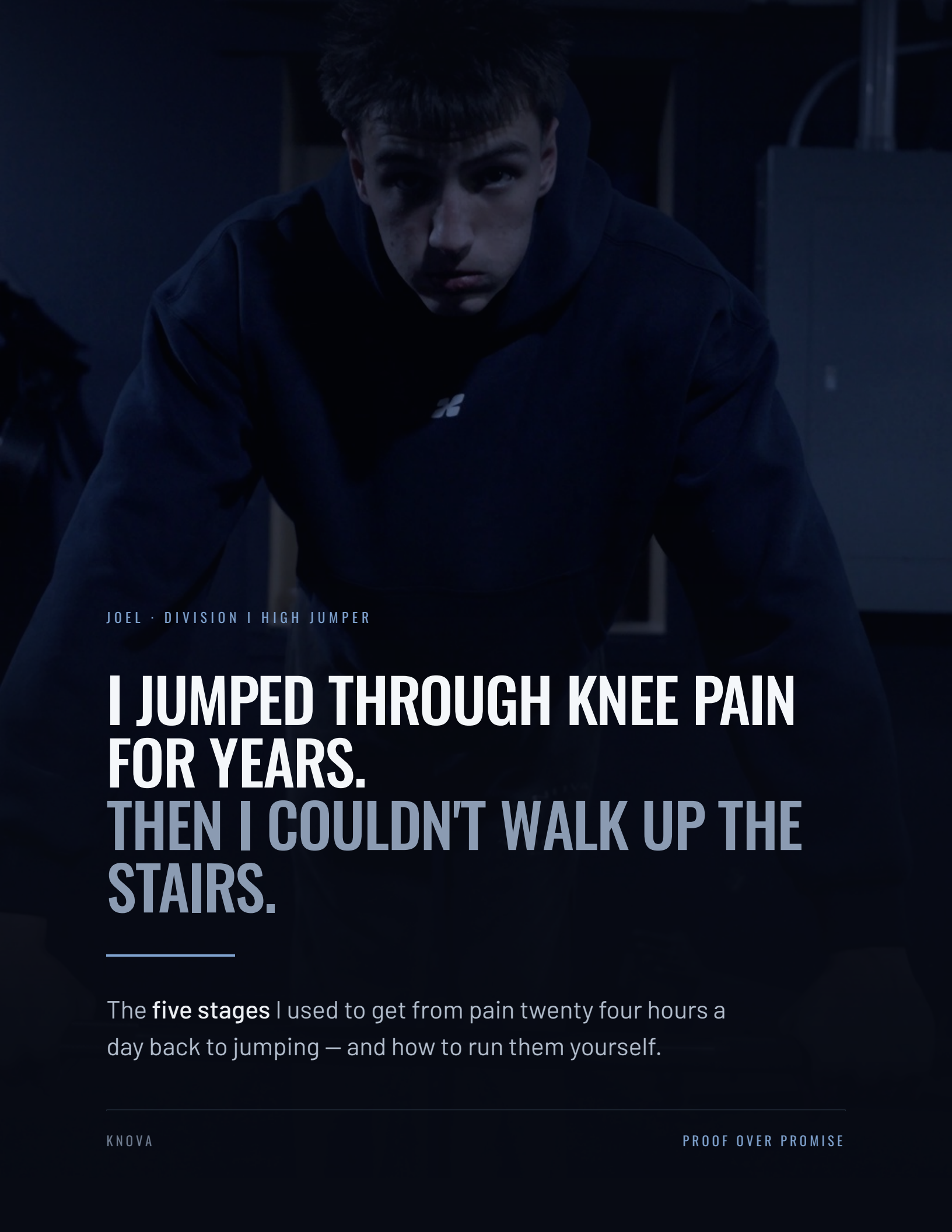




JOEL · DIVISION I HIGH JUMPER

I JUMPED THROUGH KNEE PAIN FOR YEARS. THEN I COULDN'T WALK UP THE STAIRS.

The **five stages** I used to get from pain twenty four hours a day back to jumping — and how to run them yourself.

BEFORE YOU START

WHAT THIS IS

This is what I did, in the order I did it, to get out of chronic knee pain and back to jumping. It took months, not weeks. I'm a high jumper, not a doctor — this is my experience, not a prescription.

WHAT IT'S FOR

Pain in the tendon just below the kneecap. It's worse with jumping and landing, it warms up a few minutes into a session so you convince yourself it's fine, and it's worse the next morning. That pattern is the one this fixed.

WHEN TO GO SEE SOMEONE INSTEAD

If your knee locks, gives way, or swells. If the pain arrived in one specific moment rather than building over weeks. If it sits deep inside or behind the joint rather than on the tendon. Or if you run all of this properly and nothing changes. Get it looked at by a physio or a doctor — that's a different problem and this won't touch it.

The rule that governs everything: zero to three out of ten. You're supposed to feel it working. You never go past a three. And tomorrow tells you whether today was right.

STAGE 01

STOP DOING THE THING THAT HURTS

For years I jumped through it. Every session I told myself it would settle down. It never settled down. It got worse and worse until it hurt twenty four hours a day and I couldn't get up a flight of stairs.

Here is the part nobody wants to hear. A tendon cannot repair while you keep loading it past what it can currently take. If you play basketball and playing hurts your knee, you don't get to keep playing and fix it at the same time. Same if you jump. You pick one.

Cut the *specific* thing producing the pain. Not all of your training — the thing that hurts. Everything in the rest of this guide is what you do instead.

This is the stage everyone skips, and skipping it is the reason the other four don't work for them. I know, because I skipped it for years.

WHAT YOU CAN STILL DO

Stage one is not sitting on the couch. It's removing one input. Everything that doesn't produce the pain stays in — upper body, core, sled, bike, and every exercise in the stages that follow. You are cutting the thing that hurts, not your training.

HOW LONG IT LASTS

Until your constant pain settles and the isometrics in stage two are doing their job. There's no fixed number of weeks. Your knee decides, and it tells you every morning.

STAGE 02

ISOMETRICS

Hold a loaded position. No movement. This is the stage that takes the pain down.

THE DOSE

SETS	3 to 5
HOLD	45 seconds
FREQUENCY	3 times a day, roughly 6 hours apart
HOW LONG	Every day, from here to the end

PICK ONE

- **Knee extension hold** — kettlebell hooked over the ankle, or a knee extension machine. This is the one I use.
- **Spanish squat** — band behind the knees, sit back into it.
- **Wall sit** — double leg, then single leg once double gets easy.
- **Split stance hold**

WHY THEY WORK

Isometrics have an analgesic effect — your pain drops for up to about 45 minutes after a set. That's not a distraction, it's a window. Put your sets before whatever you need to do without pain. They also load the tendon enough for it to start getting stronger, without the movement that flares it up.

STAGE 03 · FOUR SECONDS DOWN, FOUR SECONDS UP

SLOW HEAVY SQUATS

Start these once the isometrics have brought your day to day pain down. Not before.

EXERCISE

Back squat, front squat, or belt squat. Any of the three.

TEMPO

4 seconds down, 4 seconds up

REPS

4 to 6

FREQUENCY

Every other day

LOAD

Starts at 1 to 3 out of 10 pain. Builds to 80% of max.

The signal you got it right: the next day, the knee feels slightly better than it did. That's the entire feedback loop. Better means you can add load. Worse means you went too heavy.

THE TEMPO IS THE WHOLE POINT

Count them as slow seconds and don't rush it. Time under tension is what makes the tendon adapt rather than just the muscle. A fast rep at the same weight does almost nothing for you here.

THE LOAD

Start at a weight that produces about one to three out of ten pain in the knee. You are supposed to feel this. You never go over a three. Add weight when yesterday's session left the knee feeling better the following morning, and only then.

BUILD TO

Eighty percent of your squat max, at that tempo, for sets of four to six. That's the number I worked toward and it took months of small jumps to get there.

Once slow squats are in, they never come out. You keep doing them through every stage that follows, all the way back into your sport.

STAGE 04

LEARN TO LAND AGAIN

Depth drop landings. You are not jumping out of these. You step off a box, land, absorb the force, and stop.

START AT A low box – 12 to 20 inches

PROGRESS TO 30 to 36 inches, over the following weeks

THE JOB Control the landing. Absorb the force into the knee.

WHY LANDING COMES BEFORE JUMPING

Your tendon has to relearn how to absorb force. Absorbing is what fails when you land, and it's the quality you lost while the knee was too sore to load. Taking force under control is a skill, and it comes back before power does.

HOW TO KNOW THE BOX IS TOO HIGH

If you're crashing down, if your knee collapses inward, if you're loud on the floor – the box is too high. Drop it. There is no prize for the number.

Don't move on until you own 30 to 36 inches and the next day still feels fine.

A person in a white t-shirt and dark shorts is captured mid-jump, reaching their right arm high towards a basketball hoop. The background shows a gymnasium with a wooden floor and a brick wall, with trees visible outside. The image is overlaid with a dark, semi-transparent layer.

STAGE 05 · THE PART YOU ACTUALLY CAME BACK FOR

LEARN TO JUMP AGAIN

Three progressions, in this order. Slow squats and isometrics keep running underneath all of them.

01 SEATED BOX JUMPS

Start from a seated position and jump. No dip, no countermovement. That removes the stretch shortening cycle, which is where the biggest forces on the tendon come from. You get to relearn producing force without the load that flares it up. Run these alongside your depth drops.

02 COUNTERMOVEMENT JUMPS

Now the eccentric and the concentric go back together, fast. This is the full thing again. Add them when the seated jumps and the depth drops stop producing next day soreness, then build effort up progressively until you're jumping at a hundred percent.

03 BACK TO YOUR SPORT

Progressively. That word is doing all the work in this sentence. Add volume back one piece at a time, so you know exactly which piece flared it.

THE RULES THAT NEVER CHANGE

1 **Isometrics stay in.**

Three times a day, every day, the whole way through. They're the thing keeping your pain manageable while everything else does the rebuilding.

2 **You never stop slow squatting.**

Not when it feels better, not when you're back jumping. It comes out when you decide you want the pain back.

3 **Zero to three out of ten. Never past a three.**

Not on a good day, not when you feel strong.

4 **Judge by tomorrow, not today.**

Next day feel is the only honest measure of whether a session was right. Everything feels fine while you're warm.

5 **A flare up is information.**

Go back and look at what you changed. You did too much. It's almost always volume, box height, or load added too fast.

6 **When you flare, drop to the last stage that felt fine and rebuild from there.**

You don't start over.

7 **Slow is the fast version.**

Every single time I rushed this, it cost me weeks.

THE WHOLE THING ON ONE PAGE

	WHAT	DOSE
01	Cut the activity producing the pain	Until the constant pain settles
02	Isometrics — knee extension hold, Spanish squat, wall sit, split stance hold	3 to 5 sets of 45 seconds, 3 times a day, 6 hours apart. Never stops.
03	Slow squats — back, front or belt squat, 4 seconds down and 4 seconds up	4 to 6 reps, every other day, building to 80% of max. Never stops.
04	Depth drop landings — step off, land, absorb, stop	12 to 20 inches, progressing to 30 to 36 inches over weeks
05	Seated box jumps, then countermovement jumps, then back to sport	Seated alongside stage 4. Countermovement once that's clean, built to 100%.

This is my own experience as an athlete, not medical advice, and it isn't a diagnosis. Knee pain has a lot of causes and only some of them respond to this. If your knee locks, gives way, swells, or the pain started in a single moment, see a physio or a doctor before you run any of it.



IT'S SLOW, IT'S BORING, AND IT WORKED.

The version that doesn't work is the one where you skip stage one and hope the rest carries it.