Abstract Knee pain is often underreported, underestimated and undertreated. This study was conducted to estimate the prevalence, burden and further identify socioeconomic factors influencing ethnic differences in knee pain and symptoms of OA among older adults aged 55 years and over in Greater Kuala Lumpur (the capital city of Malaysia). The sample for the Malaysian Elders Longitudinal Research (MELoR) was selected using stratified random sampling, by age and ethnicity from the electoral rolls of three parliamentary constituencies. Information on knee pain was available in 1226 participants, mean age (SD) 68.96 (1.57) years (409 Malay, 416 Chinese, 401 Indian). The crude and weighted prevalence of knee pain and self-reported knee OA symptoms were 33.3% and 30.8% respectively. There were significant ethnic differences in knee pain (crude prevalence: Malays 44.6%, Chinese 23.5% and Indians 31.9%, p< 0.001). The presence of two or more non-communicable diseases (NCD) attenuated the increased risk of knee pain among the ethnic Indians compared to the ethnic Chinese. The prevalence of knee pain remained significantly higher among the ethnic Malays after adjustment for confounders. While the prevalence of knee pain in our older population appears similar to that reported in other published studies in Asia, the higher prevalence among the ethnic Malays has not previously been reported. Further research to determine potential genetic susceptibility to knee pain among the ethnic Malays is recommended.