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Bursitis Pain

By Tyler Dyck

Bursitis is perhaps the most misunderstood and misdiagnosed condition affecting the musculo-skeletal system. First of all, let's define what a bursa is. A bursa is a fluid-filled sac that your body uses to decrease friction. They are typically found near where tendons attach to bone, such as at the elbow, kneecap, and lateral hip, so that the tendon slides harmlessly over the bursa and does not get damaged by the hard surface of the bone. Bursitis is the condition that occurs when there is an inflammatory response in the bursa. This is fairly easy to recognize as there will be localized swelling, heat, redness, and the area will also be tender to pressure. Common locations for bursitis to occur are the kneecap (frequently seen in carpenters or brick-layers), the tip of the elbow (frequently seen in students leaning on their desks with the bony part of their elbows), the outer hip (seen from falls or impact injuries), and the top part of the shoulder (seen in people who reach overhead for their jobs or sports). A person affected with a true bursitis will often still be able to move the body area with minimal pain or restriction, and usually only gets pain if the inflamed bursa has direct pressure on it. So if your symptoms don't fit the description above, you probably have something other than bursitis and should have a thorough assessment performed by a physiotherapist to determine what is causing your pain.

If you do have true bursitis, treatment for this condition is quite simple. First, remove or avoid any direct pressure on the affected area. This will likely mean modifying the way you perform certain tasks, and by wearing loose fitting clothing. Those of you who perform activities requiring long periods of time on your knees, such as gardening, should make it a habit to wear knee pads. This will prevent irritation of the many bursa-related problems at the knee. If you are a side sleeper, be sure to alternate sides regularly to avoid irritating the trochanteric bursa on the outer side of the hip. When studying or reading at a desk for long periods of time, avoid aggravating the bursa on the tip of your elbow by using padding or by supporting your upper body weight with the muscular part of your forearms rather than the bony points of your elbows. If you must work with your arms overhead for long periods of time, make it a habit to lower your arms and rest often during such activity.

To help control inflammation in a bursa, use ice on the affected area for 10-15 minutes at a time, and for several times a day. Make sure the ice is making light contact only. It may be also of benefit to see your family physician regarding a short-term course of anti-inflammatories.

Third, if the inflammation persists for more than 2-3 days, you may need to pay a visit to

your physiotherapist to determine if there are any surrounding factors such as muscle tightness or weakness that may have predisposed you to developing the bursitis in the first place.

On first assessment, your physiotherapist will take a detailed history in order to rule out any lifestyle or habitual causes of the bursitis. Secondly, through a series of tests, your physiotherapist will thoroughly assess the range of motion of the local and surrounding joints, and the strength of the related muscles, in order to determine the mechanical cause of the bursitis. Lastly, "hands-on" manual therapy and appropriate exercises from your physiotherapist can help you fix any mechanical problems contributing to the bursitis. Once the mechanical problems are taken care of and the inflammation is resolved there shouldn't be any more "acting up" to slow you down.

For further information on this topic please contact the Fawzia Sultan Rehabilitation Institute (FSRI) in Hawally at 264-2862, or check out our website at www.rehabinstitutekuwait.com

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