

Bursitis

Prevention and Treatment Strategies for Bursitis



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What is a bursa?

Bursae are tiny fluid filled sacs located in areas of the body where bones, ligaments and tendons connect. There are more than 150 bursae in the human body and they act as cushions for joints. The bursae help to decrease friction between moving parts and without them movement would be painful.

What is bursitis?

Put simply, bursitis is inflammation of the bursa. When inflammation occurs, any movement or stress on the bursa causes pain and prevents the bursa from working properly.

Some common signs of bursitis are a dull ache or stiffness in the affected area; increased pain with movement; tenderness; swelling; redness; and heat.

Although there are many bursae located throughout the body, the most common areas of complaint are the shoulders, elbows, hips and knees.

What causes bursitis?

The main causes of bursitis can be broken into two major areas: chronic bursitis, which is caused by overuse or repetition, and acute bursitis, which is caused by traumatic injury.

In the first instance, any prolonged, repetitive movement of a joint will place strain on the bursa, which over time can cause inflammation and tenderness and result in bursitis. For example, prolonged hammering or vacuuming can place strain on the bursae in the elbow and wrist, and result in bursitis.

The other major cause of bursitis is traumatic injury, which can include an impact or twisting injury to one of the joints. Car crashes and falls commonly result in damage to the bursae.

Bursitis Treatment

One of the most common treatments for bursitis is anti-inflammatory drugs, although quite

effective, there are many other useful treatments. Follow the advice below and you should see a big improvement with 7 to 10 days.

1. **Rest and Immobilize**

Once bursitis is diagnosed it is important that the affected area be rested as soon as possible. Any further movement or stress will only aggravate the condition and prolong recovery. It is also important to keep the injured area as still as possible. If necessary, support the injured area with a sling or brace.

2. **Ice**

It is important to apply ice as soon as possible as this will help to lay the foundation for a complete and speedy recovery. The application of ice will also have the greatest effect on reducing swelling and pain.

How do you apply ice? Crushed ice in a plastic bag is usually best. However, blocks of ice, commercial cold packs and bags of frozen peas will all do fine.

When using ice, be careful not to apply it directly to the skin. This can cause "ice burns" and further skin damage. Wrapping the ice in a damp towel generally provides the best protection for the skin.

How long? How often? This is the point where few people agree. Let me give you some figures to use as a rough guide, and then I will give you some advice from personal experience. The most common recommendation is to apply ice for 20 minutes every 2 hours for the first 48 to 72 hours.

These figures are a good starting point, but remember they are only a guide. You must take into account that some people are more sensitive to cold than others are. Also, be aware that children and elderly people have a lower tolerance to ice and cold. Finally, people with circulatory problems are also more sensitive to ice. Remember to keep these things in mind when treating yourself or someone else with ice.

Personally, I recommend that people use their own judgement when applying ice to themselves. For some people, 20 minutes is too long. For others, especially well conditioned athletes, they can leave ice on for up to an hour at a time. The individual should make the decision as to how long the ice should stay on.

My personal recommendation is that people should apply ice for as long as it is comfortable. Obviously, there will be a slight discomfort from the cold, but as soon as pain or excessive discomfort is experienced, it is time to remove the ice. It is much better to apply ice for 3 to 5 minutes a couple of times an hour, than not at all.

Bursitis Prevention

To follow are a number of useful strategies that will help to prevent bursitis and other joint pain.

Firstly, learn to identify the activities that cause bursitis and either avoid those activities or modify them to reduce the pressure and stress on your joints. For example, if kneeling causes discomfort and bursitis in your knee joints, use a cushion or kneepads, or maybe you could use a small stool to sit on instead of kneeling.

Secondly, take adequate breaks, ensure sufficient rest periods when working out or performing repetitive tasks, and do not perform the same activity continuously for hours at a time.

Lastly, stretch and strengthen! The aim here is to gradually improve the strength and flexibility of the muscles, ligaments and tendons around the injured area.

When attempting to increase the strength of surrounding muscles, be sure to approach this in a gradual, systematic way of lightly over-loading the muscles and tendons. Be careful not to over-do this type of training. Patience is required.

An affective and relatively safe way to start is to begin with **isometric** exercises. These are exercise where the effected joint itself does not move, yet force is applied and the muscles are contracted.

For example, imagine sitting in a chair while facing a wall and then placing the ball of your foot against the wall. In this position, you can push against the wall with your foot and at the same time keep your ankle and knee joint from moving. The muscles contract but the ankle and knee joint does not move. This is an isometric exercise.

It is also important at this stage to introduce some gentle stretching exercise. These will help to further increase your range of motion and take pressure off the effected joint. While working on increasing your flexibility it is important to remember all the muscle groups around the injured area.

Stretching is one of the most under-utilized techniques for improving athletic performance, preventing sports injury and properly rehabilitating sprain and strain injury. Don't make the mistake of thinking that something as simple as stretching won't be effective.



For an easy-to-use, quick reference guide of **more than 100 clear photographs of every possible stretch**, for every major muscle group in your body, get a copy of The Stretching Handbook. You'll also learn the benefits of flexibility; the rules for safe stretching; and how to stretch properly. [Click here to learn more about The Stretching Handbook.](#)

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