

Bursitis of the Elbow, Knee, and Heel

What is bursitis?

Bursitis (ber-CY-tuss) is a swelling of a bursa. A bursa is a small sac that is just below the skin. These sacs are filled with fluid. They are located behind the bony point of an elbow, in front of the kneecap, and behind the heel bone.

What causes it?

- Too much rubbing and pressure on a bursa can cause it to get irritated and swell. This can happen after kneeling many times, leaning on the tip of the elbow, or wearing shoes that do not fit.
- A hard blow to the front of the knee, the back of the elbow, or to the heel bone can cause the bursa to bleed or make too much fluid and swell.
- An insect bite, scratch, or puncture wound close to a bursa can cause skin breaks and infection. People with chronic conditions such as diabetes are more likely to develop an infection in a bursa.
- People with certain conditions, such as gout, rheumatoid arthritis, or chronic kidney disease, are also more likely to get bursitis.

What are the symptoms?

- Swelling and pain in a bursa. This may limit the motion of your elbow, knee, or ankle.
- If you have an infection, you might get a fever.

How is it diagnosed?

Sometimes a doctor can tell if you have bursitis just by examining you. Other times, blood tests, x-rays, and other tests are needed.

How is it treated?

Your doctor may recommend the following:

- Avoiding activities that can cause rubbing or pressure and pain around the bursa.
- Wearing pads around the bursa.
- Wearing well-fitted shoes for heel bursitis.
- Taking pain medicines such as acetaminophen (Tylenol) or ibuprofen (Advil).
- Your doctor may remove extra fluid from the bursa with a needle or use antibiotics to treat an infection.
- In rare cases, you might need to be in the hospital or have surgery.

Where can I get more information?

Your doctor

American Academy of Orthopaedic Surgeons
<http://orthoinfo.aaos.org/topic.cfm?topic=a00028>

National Institutes of Health
<https://medlineplus.gov/bursitis.html>

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This handout is provided to you by your family doctor and the American Academy of Family Physicians. Other health-related information is available from the AAFP online at <http://familydoctor.org>.

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