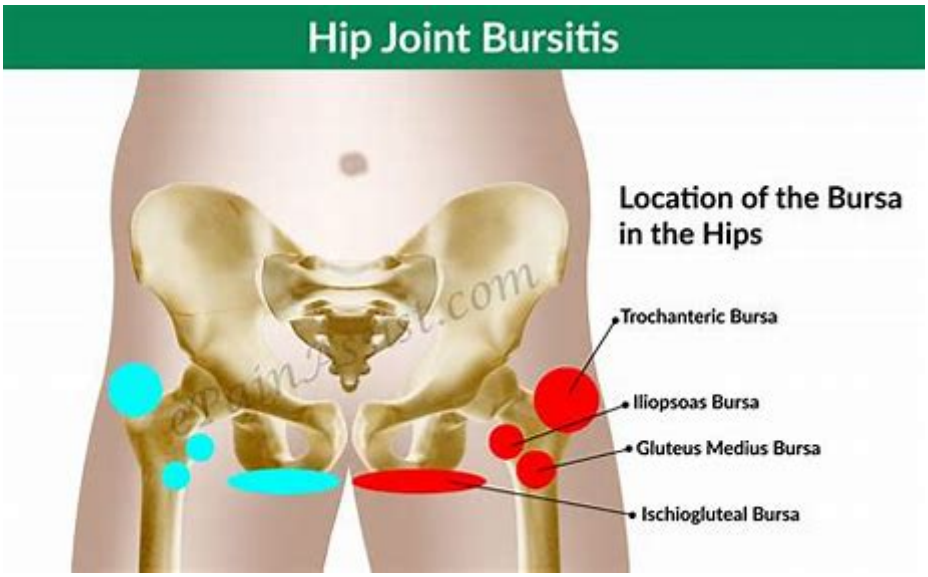
Hip bursitis (Trochanteric Bursitis)

Hip bursitis is often confused with other conditions that also cause outer hip pain, and sometimes it occurs together with one of these conditions. In this article, I explain hip bursitis symptoms and causes as well as how to treat it, including massage and which exercises to avoid. Remember, if you need more help with an injury, you're welcome to book an in clinic, at home or on-line appointment with one of our sports and exercise therapists.



What is a bursa and where does hip bursitis hurt?

A bursa is a little fluid-filled sac, and you have them wherever a muscle or tendon is close to a bone. They sit between the muscle or tendon and the bone and in some cases between muscles, and their function is to prevent friction between these various body parts. They are like little cushions put in between to stop them bumping and rubbing against each other.



(Image courtesy of ePainAssist.com)

Humans commonly have nine bursae in the hip (although not everyone has exactly nine), because there are so many muscles in that area: the gluteus maximus, medius, and minimus, the piriformis muscle deep inside the hip, as well as quite a few smaller muscles. All of these muscles are attached to the hip bone or the top of the thigh bone with tendons.

Quite often it's more than one bursa that's causing the pain. This is why injections to relieve hip bursitis pain sometimes don't work as it can be difficult to identify exactly which bursae are causing the pain. The image below shows where hip bursitis pain is commonly felt:



What is hip bursitis?

Bursae have many nerve endings. So, when they become injured or irritated, it causes a lot of pain. There are two main ways in which a hip bursa can get injured or an existing bursitis can be aggravated:

1. A sudden impact

This usually happens when you fall on your side, like when you fall off a bicycle or trip and fall, or from a side impact direct to the area such as a tackle in rugby. In this case, the pain usually sets in within a few hours to a day after the impact.

2. Excessive friction or compression

This is the more common cause of hip bursitis. Whilst the primary role of a bursa is to reduce friction, it can only sustain a certain amount of force. If, for some reason, the compression and friction are a lot more than it can handle, it will get painful and sometimes inflamed.

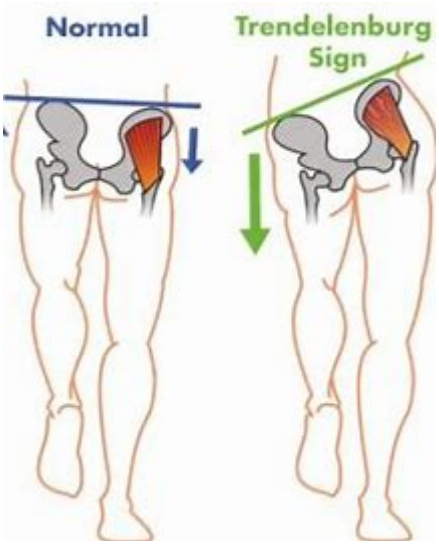
Biomechanics

A biomechanical cause of hip bursitis is when the knee turns inwards excessively when you run or walk. This pulls the muscles and tendons tightly over the hip bone.

People usually stand, walk, or run like this because it's become a habit, they have weak glute muscles, or when they're very tired.



Another biomechanical cause can be seen in the way catwalk models walk, with an excessive sideways tilting of the hips. There's actually a name for it – the Trendelenburg Sign, and walking or running like this stretches the muscles, tendons, and IT band tightly over the outside of the hip bone, which increases pressure on the bursae. This position is often held by mothers holding babies on their hips.



Sudden overuse

This often occurs when you do certain strenuous activities without having followed a progressive programme of exercise.

Bursae are like many other parts of the body – if you slowly increase the amount of pressure they have to handle, they will adapt to it, but if you overdo it and/or they don't get enough time to recover between activities, it becomes a problem.

Examples include running a very hilly race without having trained for it properly or suddenly doing a lot of hill walking. The effect on the bursae becomes worse when this makes you really tired and you lose your running or walking form.

Tightness

Excessive tightness in the muscles that cross over the hip bursae will increase the pressure there and irritate them. Tight muscles can also pull the IT band too tightly over the outside of the hip. When undertaking a long run for example, the muscles my become tight as the fatigue sets in and in turn they will apply greater pressure onto the bursae.

Tightness in certain muscles in the lower back can also cause tightness over the hip.

Snapping hip

There is a condition known as "snapping hip"; this is where you feel your IT band going "click-click-click" over the outside of your hip. This is quite common in people with hypermobility, for example, gymnasts.

How to diagnose hip bursitis

Bursitis pain is easily confused with other conditions and vice versa. This is because there are several things that can cause pain in the area where the bursae are.

Bursitis pain is usually over the outside of the hip, but it can refer pain down the side of the leg. It can also, if it's very irritated, cause your lower back to tighten up and make that hurt.

There's sometimes a clue in how the pain developed. For instance, a tendon tear usually delivers a sudden sharp pain, while bursitis tends to have a more gradual onset. It is useful to monitor how the symptoms behave over the 24 hours after exercise. For instance, if you are okay to do lots of weight-bearing activities and it doesn't really make it worse, it is unlikely to be bursitis. The same if you can stand for extended periods of time without pain, because bursitis doesn't really like this.

But if you find that stretching the hip hurts, e.g. you can't sit with your legs crossed, this would suggest that there could be a bit of bursitis there, although this can also irritate gluteal tendinopathy.

Treatment for hip bursitis

As with most conditions, there's no one-size-fits-all treatment. We have found that a conservative treatment approach that takes into account the sub-headings below can work really well:

Identify the cause(s)
Work on bad habits, muscular imbalances and postural misalignments
Exercise rehabilitation

For help with recovery from your hip pain, book an appointment today.