

Experiencing a painful, red, swollen elbow ? Find out more about Olecranon Bursitis

Olecranon Bursitis

What is it?

Bursae are small sacs of fluid found throughout the body. These bursae produce synovial fluid and act to reduce friction between muscles, tendons, ligaments and bones as they move over each other. Bursae are located at strategic points, typically where there are higher points of stress. If a bursa is injured or irritated, it can become inflamed, painful, red and swollen and this condition is referred to as bursitis.

One bursa that is commonly affected is the olecranon bursa, which sits just over the hard bony process at the base of the elbow. Olecranon bursitis refers to inflammation of the bursa at this point and is a common condition, particularly in men between the ages of 30-60.

What causes it?

Olecranon bursitis has a few different causes including trauma, overuse and infection. A sharp blow to the elbow, through a fall or hit, might damage the bursa leading to bursitis. In other cases, the bursa can be infected by bacteria, which enter the body through a small skin tear.

Bursitis can also develop slowly through friction of the nearby muscles that cause the bursa to become irritated and inflamed.

What are the symptoms?

The hallmark of this condition is a painful, red, swollen

elbow. Typically pain is worst when resting on the tip of the elbow and/or with elbow movements, particularly when bending or straightening the elbow fully. The pain often lasts a few months and may not go away on its own. The pain may build up gradually, or come on suddenly, depending on the cause. Bursitis caused by infection (septic bursitis) may also be associated with general feelings of illness such as fatigue, fever and body aches.

What is the treatment?

As there are many different causes of this condition, accurate diagnosis is essential. Your physiotherapist is able to distinguish between olecranon bursitis and similar conditions such as rheumatoid arthritis or fibromyalgia. Septic bursitis will need to be treated by a medical professional who will determine the best course of action.

All types of bursitis can be managed initially with a RICE protocol to reduce pain and swelling (Rest, ice, compression and elevation). Mechanical causes of bursitis can require more in-depth identification of the factors that may have led to the development of this condition.

Common contributing factors are throwing technique, muscle tightness and/or weakness and training frequency. Your physiotherapist is able to address these factors plus provide taping support to unload the bursa along with manual therapy and an exercise program.

In most cases, conservative or non-surgical treatment is attempted as the first line of treatment. If this is unsuccessful, cortisone injections are often used to reduce pain and inflammation. In severe cases where the pain persists despite all other attempts at treatment, the bursa can be surgically removed in a procedure called a bursectomy. Once the pain has subsided your physiotherapist is also able to help prevent any further recurrence.

None of the information in this article is a replacement for proper medical advice. Always see a medical professional for advice on your individual injury.

Can Poor Balance Lead To Ankle Sprains?

Ankle sprains are one of the most common sporting injuries and most people have experienced one at least once in their lifetime. While they are common, this doesn't lessen their negative impacts. Surprisingly, having poor balance might be increasing your risk of ankle sprains. Here we discuss a few facts about balance and what you can do to reduce your risk of ankle injuries.

Why are ankles particularly vulnerable to injuries related to poor balance?

Our ankles have to support our entire body weight when standing on one foot. To provide us with agility as well as stability, our ankles have the ability to move from side to side as well as back and forwards. There is a complicated process constantly operating to keep your foot in the correct position while supporting all this weight, particularly with

quick changes of direction, activities done on tiptoes, jumping and landing.

If the ankle rolls excessively inwards or outwards, the ligaments on the outside of the ankle can be damaged and torn. Balance is an important part of keeping the ankle in the correct alignment and not twisting too far to either side during challenging activities.

A study of high school basketball players by Timothy McGuine et al. in 2010 showed that students with poor balance were up to seven times more likely to sprain their ankle than students with good balance. Other studies have shown that balance training is an effective way of preventing falls in elderly populations.

Balance can vary from one leg to the other.

Most of us tend to favour one side of our body for all activities. This is more obvious in the upper body, with most of us identifying as either left or right handed. The same is also true for our lower body, with each of us favouring one leg over the other for balance activities. This can mean that one leg has better balance and strength than the other, leaving the other leg more vulnerable to injury.

Reduced balance can mean your body has to work harder to perform activities, with muscles activating in a less coordinated way. Improving your balance can also improve your body's efficiency of movement, which can, in turn, improve your overall performance without actually improving your muscle strength.

Balance can be trained rapidly.

Balance is one of the most overlooked dimensions of physical health however, the good news is that it can be improved relatively quickly. Do a quick check to see if you can stand on each leg for two minutes with your eyes closed. If this is

difficult you might find that improving your balance is a great next step in your training program.

Your physiotherapist is able to identify any deficits in your balance is and is able to develop a training program for you to improve your balance. Come and see us for an appointment to see how we can help. None of the information in this article is a replacement for proper medical advice. Always see a medical professional for advice on your individual injury.