

Informational Guide to Iliotibial Band Syndrome

Introduction

The iliotibial band (ITB) is a tendon that connects the tensor fascia lata, a small muscle at the outside edge of the pelvis, to the outside of the tibia (the lower leg bone). Irritation to this tendon often affects athletes and causes pain at the outside of the knee joint.

As the knee bends, the ITB rubs over the outside of the femur (thigh bone) just above the knee. A bursa, or fluid-filled sac, naturally lies between the ITB and the femur to reduce the friction created during repetitive activities. Unfortunately, the ITB and this bursa can get irritated and inflamed through poor movement patterns as well as weakness in hip muscles causing a bowed or knock kneed position.

Symptoms

Typically, pain associated with ITB syndrome is felt along the outside of the affected knee. This pain will get worse with and following activities requiring repetitive knee and hip movements.

As the bursa is increasingly irritated, the pain can travel up the side of the thigh. Sometimes a pop or other noise can be heard or felt at the outside of the knee joint.

Diagnosis

This syndrome is generally diagnosed by taking a thorough history of the symptoms and onset, as well as identifying any potential change in the patient's activity level prior to the onset of pain.

X-rays may be taken, or an MRI ordered, to rule out other causes including bone fracture or other soft tissue dysfunctions.

Treatment

Non-surgical, conservative treatment, including physical therapy, is typically ordered to treat iliotibial band syndrome. This may include heat, ice, ultrasound, bracing and anti-inflammatory medication prescribed by a physician.

Correction of muscle imbalances with therapeutic exercise and/or taping or bracing will be performed. Custom orthotics may be indicated to change the position of the foot to minimize stress on the ITB.

A cortisone injection may be administered into the affected bursa to decrease the inflammation if conservative methods are not helping to decrease the symptoms.

Though surgical treatment is extremely rare, it can be used as an option to alleviate intense symptoms. Removal of the irritated bursa as well as cutting/lengthening the ITB are two surgical options that may be addressed to decrease the amount of friction at the lateral femur during knee bending.

Rehabilitation

Initially, rehabilitation for ITB Syndrome will consist of reducing the activity levels that produce excess strain at the knee or the underlying bursa. To decrease the inflammation and pain a physical therapist will also utilize ultrasound, deep tissue massage, ice compress, and electrical stimulation.

A physical therapist can also evaluate the need for custom orthotics/shoe inserts to minimize less stress at the knee with standing positions.

The coordination of muscles at the hip and knee will be examined. The patient will be set up with a tailored home exercise program designed for self-management and ultimately prevention of other injuries.

More Information...

For more information please contact any of our three clinics in Roseville, Spring Lake Park, or Blaine where a knowledgeable therapist will be happy to assist you with your recovery needs.