

Bursitis of the knee

What is bursitis?

Bursitis means inflammation within a bursa. A bursa is a small sac of fluid with a thin lining. There are a number of bursae in the body. Bursae are normally found around joints and in places where ligaments and tendons pass over bones and are there to stop the ligaments and bone rubbing together.

What is prepatellar bursitis?

Prepatellar bursitis is a common bursitis in the knee and can also be known as 'housemaid's knee'. There are four bursae located around the knee joint. They are all prone to inflammation.

What causes prepatellar bursitis?

There are a number of different things that can cause prepatellar bursitis, such as:

- A sudden, one-off injury to the knee such as a fall or direct blow on to the knee during sport.
- Recurrent minor injury to the knee such as spending long periods of time kneeling down, i.e. at work or whilst cleaning.

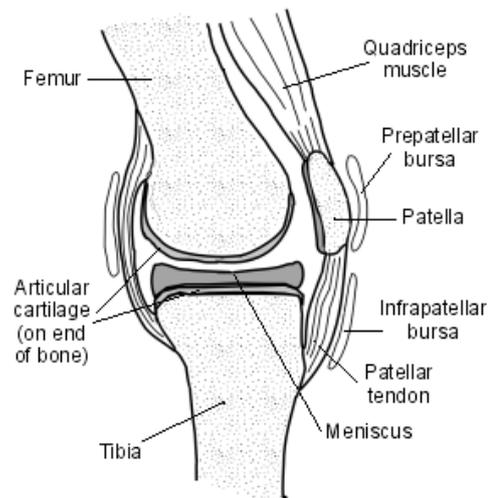
Infection: the fluid in the prepatellar bursa sac can become infected and cause bursitis. This is particularly common in children with prepatellar bursitis and usually follows a cut, scratch or injury to the skin on the surface of the knee. This injury allows bacteria (germs) to spread infection into the bursa.

Who gets prepatellar bursitis?

Any age group can be affected by prepatellar bursitis. It is generally more common in males than in females.

If you already have an inflammatory disease such as rheumatoid arthritis or gout, you have an increased risk of developing a bursitis.

The diagram below shows the position of the prepatellar and infrapatellar bursa in the knee.



Side View of Knee

People receiving steroid treatment or those on chemotherapy treatment for cancer are also at an increased risk of developing bursitis.

Prepatellar bursitis is more common in tradesmen who spend long periods of time kneeling. For example, carpet fitters, concrete finishers and roofers.

What are the symptoms of prepatellar bursitis?

Prepatellar bursitis causes pain and swelling of the affected knee. You may notice redness of the skin over the knee and your kneecap may be tender. You may also have difficulty bending your knee and difficulty kneeling and walking. If prepatellar bursitis is caused by infection, you may have a fever (high temperature).

How is prepatellar bursitis diagnosed?

Your doctor is usually able to diagnose prepatellar bursitis simply by examining your knee. They may ask you questions about your occupation or if you have had any recent knee injury. They may also ask whether you have any history of other joint problems.

If your doctor suspects that prepatellar bursitis is caused by infection, they may suggest that they draw some fluid from the bursa with a needle and send it off to the laboratory to look for signs of infection. If infection is confirmed, the laboratory may be able to suggest which antibiotics will treat it.

You do not need any X-rays or scans to diagnose prepatellar bursitis.

What are the treatment options for prepatellar bursitis?

The treatment options for prepatellar bursitis depend on whether or not it is caused by injury or infection.

If the bursitis is caused by infection your GP may treat it with antibiotics.

If the prepatellar bursitis is due to other causes, most episodes will settle with conservative treatment which includes:

- Resting the knee.
- The use of ice packs on the knee (a tea towel wrapped around a bag of frozen peas makes a good ice pack).
- The use of a thick foam cushion, or knee pads, to kneel on can help to prevent recurrence.

- A physiotherapist can help by teaching you some exercises if your knee joint is affected by a reduced range of movement.

Drug treatment

Non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs), such as ibuprofen, can be taken to help to reduce inflammation and for mild to moderate pain. Always consult your GP or pharmacist if you are unsure about taking these.

If prepatellar bursitis becomes more troublesome, your doctor may suggest that they draw out the fluid from the bursa and injecting it with steroid to help resolve the inflammation.

Surgical treatment

In very rare cases when prepatellar bursitis does not go away, or keeps recurring and is causing intolerable symptoms, surgery may be necessary.

What is the prognosis (outcome) of prepatellar bursitis?

Generally, the outcome is very good with appropriate treatment. You should find the condition clearing up in a few weeks.

Can prepatellar bursitis be prevented?

You should take care if you have a job or hobby that involves kneeling for a long time or frequently. In such cases you should use thick foam cushions or knee pads.

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