

## **Kneecap (Prepatellar) Bursitis**

Plumbers, carpet layers and other people who spend a lot of time on their knees often experience swelling in the front of the knee. The constant friction irritates a small lubricating sac (bursa) located just in front of the kneecap (patella). The bursa enables the kneecap to move smoothly under the skin. If the bursa becomes inflamed, it fills with fluid and causes swelling at the top of the knee. This condition is called prepatellar bursitis.

### **Who's at risk**

- People who constantly kneel to work, such as plumbers, roofers, carpet layers, coal miners or gardeners.
- Athletes who participate in sports where direct blows or falls on the knee are common, such as football, wrestling or basketball.
- Someone who has been in a motor vehicle collision.
- People with rheumatoid arthritis or gout.

### **Symptoms**

- Pain with activity, but not usually at night.
- Rapid swelling on the front of kneecap.
- Tender and warm to the touch.

### **Treatment**

Your doctor may first recommend an X-ray to rule out the possibility of a fracture. Conservative treatment is usually effective, as long as the bursa is simply inflamed and not infected.

- Rest. Discontinue the activity or substitute another activity until the bursitis clears up.
- Apply ice at regular intervals three or four times a day for 20 minutes at a time. Each session should reduce swelling considerably if the knee is also being rested.
- Elevate the affected leg except when necessary to walk.
- Take an anti-inflammatory medication such as aspirin or ibuprofen.

If the swelling is significant, your physician may decide to drain (aspirate) the bursa with a needle. Chronic swelling that causes disability may also be treated by draining the bursa, but if

the swelling continues, your orthopaedic surgeon may recommend surgical removal of the bursa. The operation is an outpatient procedure. It takes a few days for the knee to regain its flexibility and some weeks before normal activities can be resumed.

### **Preventing knee bursitis**

You can help prevent bursitis by following these simple recommendations:

1. Wear kneepads if you work on your knees or participate in high-risk sports such as football, basketball or wrestling.
2. Rest your knees regularly by stopping to stretch your legs. You may also wish to consider switching activities on a regular basis to avoid prolonged stress on your knees.
3. Apply ice and elevate your knees after a workout.

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