

Education

Elbow (Olecranon) Bursitis

What is elbow (olecranon) bursitis?

A bursa is a fluid-filled sac that acts as a cushion between tendons, bones, and skin. Irritation or inflammation of a bursa is called bursitis. Olecranon bursitis causes pain or swelling at the point of the elbow.

How does it occur?

Repeated injury, such as falling onto the elbow or rubbing the elbow against a hard surface, causes irritation to the bursa.

What are the symptoms?

The bursa at the point of the elbow is swollen. This swelling may or may not be painful. It may hurt to bend and straighten your elbow. There may be warmth and redness. Sometimes the fluid inside the bursa can become infected.

How is it diagnosed?

Your health care provider will review your symptoms and examine your elbow.

How is it treated?

Treatment may include:

- putting ice packs on your elbow for 20 to 30 minutes every 3 to 4 hours for 2 to 3 days or until the pain and swelling go away
- wrapping an elastic bandage around your elbow to keep the bursa from swelling more
- removal of some of the bursa fluid by your health care provider with a needle and syringe
- taking anti-inflammatory medicine
- protecting your elbow with a pad.

In some cases, problems with longstanding (chronic) olecranon bursitis may require surgical removal of the bursa.

How long will the effects last?

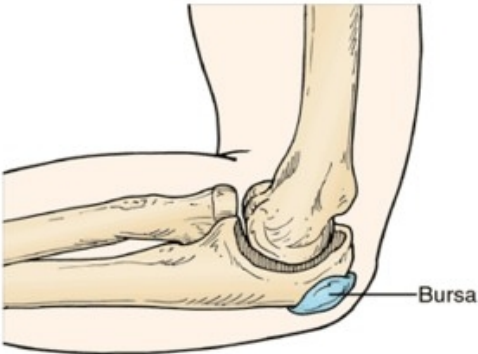
The length of recovery depends on many factors such as your age, health, and if you have had a previous injury. Recovery time also depends on the severity of the injury. The pain from olecranon bursitis is usually gone within a few weeks although there may be painless swelling for up to several months. Ask your health care provider when you can return to your normal activities.

How can I prevent olecranon bursitis?

Olecranon bursitis can be best prevented by avoiding direct contact to the point of your elbow. It is important not to irritate the bursa by leaning your elbow onto a surface such as a table or a desk.

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Elbow Bursitis



Normal elbow joint



Elbow joint with bursitis