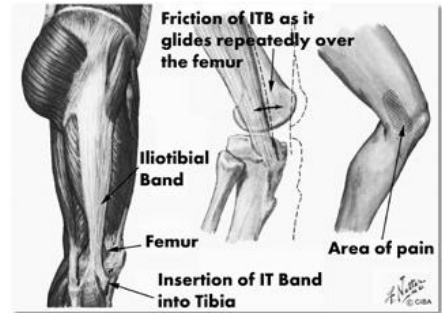


Lateral Knee Pain – IT Band Syndrome

BREAKTHRU Doctor of Physical Therapy

Iliotibial band syndrome causes pain on the outside of the knee or hip. The iliotibial band is a thick band of connective tissue that runs along the side of the thigh and contributes to movements and stability at the hip and knee. During movement of the leg, the IT band runs over prominent bony structures at the hip and knee. As the IT band repeatedly rubs against these bony areas, the IT band itself can become irritated or the bursa that runs between it and the hip bone can get damaged and become painful.



If the IT band is tight and inflexible, the friction against those bony prominences increases making irritation more likely. Overuse may cause shortening of the ITB and so can running without stretching properly. Repeated motions such as those that occur with running distances produce inflammation of the underlying structures and causes pain. There are several things that can increase the likelihood that IT band friction syndrome will develop. Footwear that is excessively worn on the lateral heel does not support the foot properly. If running mileage is increased too quickly, the IT band is not given the time needed to adapt to the stresses. Running on a banked road causes increased activation of the muscles and therefore more pressure on the IT band. Improper running shoes that are too stiff to allow the natural ankle movements necessary for optimal mechanics can alter the normal pattern of muscle firing. Abnormal or uneven arch height can make one leg functionally longer than the other and cause the muscles to work differently, just like running on a banked road. Muscle imbalances such as weak or tight hip muscles lead to compensations or altered movement patterns that are outside of the body's natural way of moving. Anatomical factors may also contribute including other tight hip muscles, leg length discrepancies, knee deformities such as “bow legged”, or even foot problems.

The best way to start prevention is by proper stretching and warm up activities, especially prior to a long run. This will help promote healthy muscles and connective tissues of proper length. Rest periods are important in any exercise program to allow the body time to heal. Without rest, the damage that is done with exercise can just keep getting worse. If running on a banked road, occasionally running in the opposite direction can give the leg a rest from the unwanted stresses. Any biomechanical abnormalities such as those mentioned above should be thoroughly assessed by someone qualified to analyze movement such as a Physical Therapist, athletic trainer, orthopedist, or podiatrist before a running program is initiated.

This is usually treated conservatively with rest, ice, controlled stretching of the IT band or other tight muscles, modification of the running routine such as avoiding hills, shorten stride, run on alternate sides of road, anti-inflammatory medications, orthotics, ultrasound, steroid injections, and strengthening exercises. It's important to eliminate what caused the problem in the first place, repair the damage, and prevent recurrence. It's good to get the IT band taken care of before it gets too bad. The earlier a problem is caught, the easier it will be to treat.

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