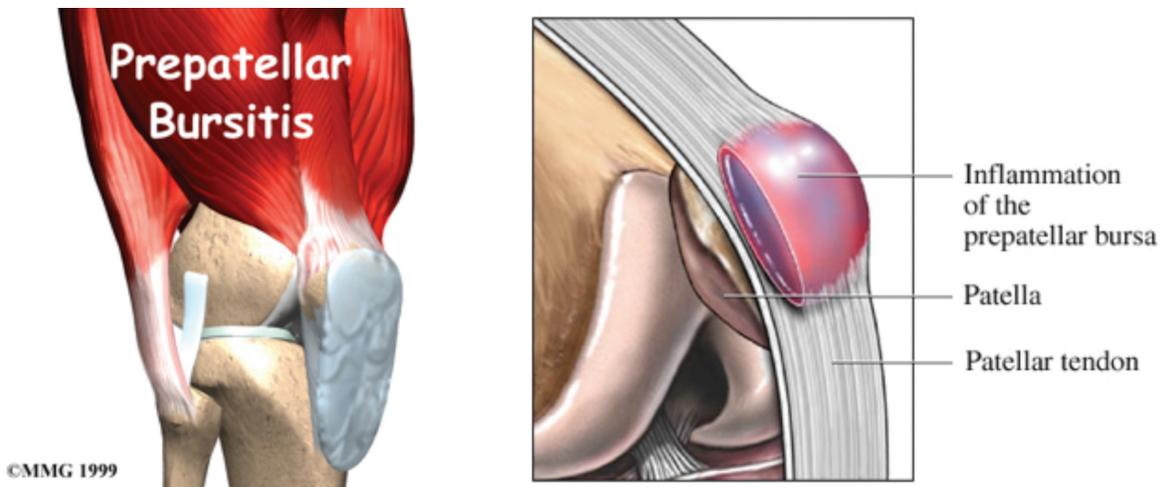


## Bursitis of the Knee

### What is Bursitis of the Knee? ("Housemaid's Knee")

Bursitis of the knee or "housemaid's knee" is caused when the pre-patellar bursa that surrounds the kneecap (patella) swells. The human body has hundreds of bursae that serve to prevent or decrease friction between two surfaces that move in opposite directions. Bursae are sacs of fluid that are located where tendons, ligaments and muscles move over bones. When the pre-patellar bursa becomes inflamed or irritated, problems arise and it will hurt when you bend or straighten the knee.

In addition to the knee, bursitis is frequently found in the hip, elbow and heel. The condition is discovered more commonly in women than men. Bursitis of the knee usually strikes people when they are middle-aged or elderly.



### Causes of Bursitis of the Knee

Kneeling on a hard surface for prolonged periods of time is the most common cause of bursitis of the knee. Overusing the pre-patellar bursa and or an inflammation of the bursa may also cause bursitis of the knee. Other possible causes of the condition include:

- Direct fall or blow to the knee
- Prolonged or excessive pressure to the knee
- Infection of the bursa

Certain occupations such as carpet layers or plumbers are at a higher risk of developing bursitis of the knee. The repetitive nature of the job irritates and thickens the bursa over a long period of time.

Injuries from sports activities can also cause the condition to appear. When a person suffers a direct blow to the knee, bleeding may occur in the bursa sack causing the bursa to swell. Over time, the bursa sack may thicken and remain sore.

An infection of the bursa can also cause the bursa sack surrounding the knee to become irritated and inflamed and filled with pus. Sometimes this may appear without warning or may be caused by a minor injury to the bursa.

### Symptoms of Bursitis of the Knee

Swelling, pain and redness at the front of the knee are the most frequent symptoms of bursitis of the knee. The pain may increase over time and it may last for months or even years. A person suffering from this condition may find it hard to bend the knee and there may be small lumps under the skin of the kneecap. These lumps are actually the thickened bursa tissues that have formed due to the inflammation.

The level of your activity affects the swelling of the bursa. If you are on your knees for a long period of time, you will notice the knee is filled with fluid.

If the bursa is infected, the area will be red and swollen and you may run a fever. If not treated, an abscess may appear on the front of the knee.

Your physician will need to perform a physical examination in order to diagnose the condition. It is important to rule out other sources of the pain before making a diagnosis. He or she will place pressure on the kneecap to see if that causes discomfort. In addition, the physician will ask about your past medical history. If infection is a possibility, your physician may remove fluid from the bursa to have it examined to determine the best way to treat it.

### Treatments of Bursitis of the Knee

The first step in treating bursitis of the knee is to rest the area temporarily, apply an ice pack to the knee and decrease activity. You will want to protect the area from any further aggravation or injury by keeping pressure off the knee and by using kneepads. If the bursitis is caused by an injury, it may disappear without further attention. The swelling will go down in a month or two and Dr. Gudeman may drain the blood from the bursa sack to speed up your recovery. There is a small chance of infection when a needle is inserted into the bursa. However, if the condition is chronic (long-term), Dr. Gudeman may recommend:

- **NSAIDs** – The uses of nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory medications (NSAIDs), such as ibuprofen, to help decrease the pain and swelling.
- **Rehabilitation** – Stretching exercises with a trained physical therapist or certified athletic trainer. It is important to strengthen the muscles around the knee joint.
- **Frequent ice packs to the knee**
- **Drainage/aspirations** – If the bursa is infected, the bursa will need to be drained with a needle several times. You may be placed on antibiotics during this time.

Surgery may be necessary if the infection doesn't clear up. An incision is made over the top of the knee and the bursa and pus are removed. After this procedure, you will need to stay off your feet for a number of days to allow the knee to heal. A bursa may grow back after the surgery but chances are it will grow back like a normal bursa.

### Informative Websites

[www.saveyourknees.org](http://www.saveyourknees.org)  
[www.orthoinfo.org](http://www.orthoinfo.org)  
[www.sportsmed.org](http://www.sportsmed.org)  
[www.aana.org](http://www.aana.org)

Helping you achieve the  
optimal activity level for your  
lifestyle is my first priority.

- Scott Gudeman, MD



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