

# Baker's cyst

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## What is a Baker's cyst?

A Baker's cyst is a swelling filled with synovial fluid, which forms behind your knee. Synovial fluid is the lubricating fluid that is usually found inside the knee joint. Baker's cysts are sometimes called popliteal cysts.

## What are the symptoms of a Baker's cyst?

In some cases a Baker's cyst causes no pain and so remains unnoticed. The common symptoms of a Baker's cyst are:

- swelling behind the knee
- knee pain
- tightness in the back of the knee
- knee stiffness
- difficulty moving the knee joint.

## What causes a Baker's cyst?

A valve-like system exists between the knee joint and the bursa (a sac of fluid) on the back of the knee, which regulates the amount of synovial fluid coming in and out of the bursa. When the knee produces too much synovial fluid (this happens when the knee is swollen) the excess fluid causes the bursa behind the knee to bulge and expand - this is what is known as a Baker's cyst.

A Baker's cyst can be the result of a problem with your knee joint, such as arthritis or a cartilage tear, which causes your knee to produce too much fluid. It sometimes also develops in people who do not have arthritis.

## REAL LIFE STORY

‘ I was about 20 and at university when I remember feeling a tightness at the back of my knee. I had no idea what it was but I didn't think it was related to my arthritis as it wasn't the joint itself affected.

About a month later my Baker's cyst burst. I had terrible swelling in the leg and it was very uncomfortable. My leg felt like it was the size of a tree trunk - I had to go into hospital for a week while the swelling subsided.

It's been fine ever since and hasn't come back. ’

## How is a Baker's cyst treated?

You should visit your doctor if you think you have a Baker's cyst. It will often disappear by itself and so you will not need treatment. There is nothing you can do to make that happen.

If the Baker's cyst is large and causes a lot of pain, doctors may drain the fluid from the knee joint using a needle. Alternatively, your doctor can also inject a corticosteroid into the knee to reduce the volume of synovial fluid being produced.

This will relieve the pain but will not prevent the reoccurrence of a Baker's cyst.

Your doctor will normally treat the underlying causes of the cyst as well as the Baker's cyst itself. For example, if you have a sports injury, such as a cartilage tear, then the torn cartilage may be removed.

## Can a Baker's cyst burst?

Rarely, a cyst may burst and leak synovial fluid into the calf region. If this happens there may be a sharp pain in the knee, swelling and sometimes redness of the calf. These symptoms closely resemble those of a blood clot in the leg (DVT or deep vein thrombosis). Therefore, if these symptoms occur, a prompt medical evaluation will be needed.

## What else can I do to help myself?

- Non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs) such as ibuprofen (Nurofen) and diclofenac (Voltarol and many more) can reduce inflammation and pain.
- Ice packs can help reduce swelling and pain - wrap ice in a towel and apply for 10-20 minutes.

## Where can I get more information and support?

**Arthritis Care** is the UK's largest charity working with and for all people who have arthritis.

We are here to help you make positive choices through our information, website, self-management training, and professional helpline. Call the free helpline for confidential support on 0808 800 4050 (10am-4pm weekdays) or email: [Helplines@arthritiscare.org.uk](mailto:Helplines@arthritiscare.org.uk)

You can find support from others with arthritis by joining our online discussion forums.

We rely on donations to fund our vital work in supporting people living with arthritis. If you would like to make a contribution, please phone us on 020 7380 6540 or you can donate online.

**[www.arthritiscare.org.uk](http://www.arthritiscare.org.uk)**

**Our information is regularly reviewed. This factsheet will be reviewed in 2013. Please check our website for up-to-date information and reference sources or call 020 7380 6577.**

*Last reviewed in 2011*

### **Note**

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Arthritis Care is now a certified member of The Information Standard. This means that you can be confident that Arthritis Care is a reliable and trustworthy source of health and social care information.



## Contact us

For confidential information and support about treatments, available care and adapting your life, contact the Arthritis Care Helpline

**Freephone: 0808 800 4050**

10am-4pm (weekdays)

Email: [Helplines@arthritiscare.org.uk](mailto:Helplines@arthritiscare.org.uk)

For information about Arthritis Care and the services we offer, contact us at: **[www.arthritiscare.org.uk](http://www.arthritiscare.org.uk)**

You can also talk to other people who are living with arthritis, through the discussion forums on our website.

### **Arthritis Care UK office and England regional services:**

Tel: 020 7380 6500

**Central England email:** [CentralEngland@arthritiscare.org.uk](mailto:CentralEngland@arthritiscare.org.uk)

**North England email:** [NorthEngland@arthritiscare.org.uk](mailto:NorthEngland@arthritiscare.org.uk)

**South England email:** [SouthEngland@arthritiscare.org.uk](mailto:SouthEngland@arthritiscare.org.uk)

### **Arthritis Care in Northern Ireland**

Tel: 028 9078 2940

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### **Arthritis Care in Scotland**

Tel: 0141 954 7776

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