

### What is my diagnosis?

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You have a lump on the point of the elbow that feels soft and contains fluid. The lump may vary in size and can be troublesome. This is called a **bursitis** – a small sack of fluid that develops to try and cushion the point of the elbow (the point of the elbow is called the **olecranon**). Combining these terms gives the diagnosis **olecranon bursitis**.

### Why has the bursitis developed?

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A bursitis can develop when a person repeatedly leans on the point of the elbow, after a fall or sometimes there is no reason. Common associations include:

- Manual jobs such as plumbers, mechanics, or electricians
- Any activities that involve a lot of leaning on the point of the elbow (olecranon)
- Certain medical conditions including rheumatoid arthritis and diabetes.

### What are the treatment options?

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Most cases of bursitis do not require treatment and **go away by themselves**. Even if a small amount of fluid remains, this rarely causes problematic symptoms, and it can be left alone. It can take a **year or two** for the bursitis to settle.

- **Avoid leaning on the elbow.** This will help settle the swelling and reduce the size of the lump.
- **Keep the elbow moving.** The joint under the bursitis is not affected by the condition and it is important to keep moving and using your elbow.
- **Aspiration (removing the fluid with a needle).** This is **NOT** routinely performed as the fluid will reaccumulate and the procedure can rarely introduce infection.
- **Surgery.** This is **rarely**, if ever, performed because:
  - The bursa is removed but is replaced by a large scar which can be sensitive and make leaning on the elbow painful
  - The swelling can come back after surgery
  - The wound can leak fluid and may require prolonged dressings with a nurse
  - Elbow stiffness and pain can develop after surgery.

## **Is there anything I should watch out for?**

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- Occasionally the bursitis becomes infected with **redness** and **pain** over the point of the elbow. If this is the case you should contact your GP.
- Infected bursitis may require antibiotics. The infection can be stubborn to resolve and you may require more than one course.

## **What do I do now?**

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We **do not** routinely arrange a hospital appointment for referrals for olecranon bursitis as most resolve by themselves over the course of a year.

After reading this information sheet if you are happy to manage your symptoms independently, you do not need to take any action.

If you wish to attend for an appointment, please contact the number on the accompanying letter within the next 6 weeks. If we do not hear from you within these 6 weeks you will be removed from the waiting list.