

Argus Orthopaedic Zone

Olecranon Bursitis! What?

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Transforming patient information into patient understanding.

Everyone has seen this, but very few know the actual name or what it is.

Jeopardy

A thin sac that you can't feel under the skin at the tip of the elbow.

What is the olecranon bursa?

A normal olecranon bursa is like looking for Waldo - you know it is there but you can't find it.

An inflamed olecranon bursa at the tip of the elbow can be seen from across the room!

What Is It?

Olecranon bursitis is an inflammation of the bursa sac between the skin and the tip of the elbow.

The inflammation can develop gradually (chronic) or suddenly (infection or trauma). Pain is variable. It is more intense and may limit motion if infection is present.

Symptoms

Pain may be present or not. The size of the bursa can be quite large about the size of a golf ball (or even bigger). The sac can fill up with fluid and occasionally blood. It may be hard to get a shirt on. As the swelling recedes, you may feel tender lumps that are nodules of scar tissue in the bursa sac. They feel like little pieces of rice.

Treatment

I examine the elbow and take an x-ray. Sometimes there is a big spur on the bone (ulna) under the bursa. I take the fluid out (aspiration) and check for infection if I feel it might be present.

If you are lucky, no spur is present and aspiration and wrapping the elbow for a few days does the trick. Maybe you will need to wear a padded elbow sleeve for a few weeks.

If no infection is present a steroid injection is often used.

Surgery

If you are not lucky the swelling keeps returning especially if a bone spur is present. To control the problem, surgery to remove the bursa sac and the spur is needed.

A long arm splint to limit elbow motion for a few weeks is usually needed after surgery. After a few more weeks the elbow is usually feeling comfortable and normal use can be started.

Happy New Year!

Keep reading in 2012. There is much more to learn!

Office Website and Argus Orthopaedic Archive

For a tremendous amount of musculoskeletal and Orthopaedic surgery information check out the office website www.orthopodsurgeon.com which also takes you to Your Orthopaedic Connection. It contains a huge amount of Orthopaedic and musculoskeletal information.

In addition, the website has the archive of every article I have written for you in Shepherd Argus. All the articles are listed from most recent back to the first one! Check it out for interesting articles you may have missed.

I appreciate all of you loyal readers and patients, present and future and welcome all newcomers!

Our goal is simple - To help people return to more pain free, functional lives. I specialize in you.

Good health. Good life. All the best to you.

Be well.

Dr. Haverbush