

Baker's Cyst

What is it?

A Baker's cyst or popliteal cyst is a fluid collection of normal knee fluid that collects in the back of the knee. It was first described by Sir Morton Baker in 1877. The most common reason that they occur is due to arthritis. Other causes are meniscal injuries or trauma to the knee. In addition to swelling or fullness behind the knee, the cyst may be tender to the touch. The cyst may be soft or firm and may increase or decrease in size over time.

Why did it happen?

When fluid accumulates in the knee it may look swollen from the front. Occasionally the fluid will be pushed to the back of the knee where it forms a collection of joint fluid that is called a cyst. It may get bigger or smaller over time depending on the amount of swelling you have. Occasionally it will leak or rupture which can cause severe pain into the calf muscle and will lead to swelling below the knee.

How can I treat it?

Treatment is not necessary but when they are large and painful some of the following things may be helpful. The remedies that you can use at home are elevation, compressive wraps (ace wraps or knee sleeves) and ice. If there is no contraindication you can use an over the counter anti-inflammatory such as ibuprofen (Motrin, Advil) or naproxyn (Aleve). It is best to take it every day for 3 – 5 days when you have a flare up.

Is there anything else to do?

A cortisone shot can be helpful to relieve both pain and swelling. They are rarely drained as they will re-occur. Although surgery to lance and drain the cyst was common many years ago it is not performed now due to the risk of reoccurrence, drainage and infection.

When severe arthritis is the cause of the swelling a total knee replacement may be a treatment option for you.