

### 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.