

My Outer Hip Hurts

Understanding Greater Trochanteric Bursitis & Tendinopathy

What Is Causing Outer Hip Pain?

Pain on the outside of the hip — over the bony prominence you can feel through your pants — is extremely common, particularly in middle-aged and older adults and in runners. The two most common causes are greater trochanteric bursitis (inflammation of the fluid-filled sac over the outer hip) and gluteal tendinopathy (irritation or degeneration of the tendons of the gluteal muscles where they attach to the outer hip bone). These conditions often occur together.

What Does It Feel Like?

- Pain directly over the outer hip bone (greater trochanter) — often quite tender to press on
- Pain lying on the affected side at night — often the most disturbing symptom
- Pain walking, climbing stairs, or after prolonged standing
- Pain that radiates down the outer thigh (not below the knee — that would suggest a nerve issue)
- Discomfort sitting with legs crossed or in a low chair
- A snapping or clicking sensation over the outer hip with movement (if the IT band is involved)

What Causes It?

- Weak hip abductor muscles (gluteus medius and minimus) — causing the IT band to rub over the bursa
- Running with a narrow stride or crossing the feet over midline
- Sudden increase in activity or mileage
- Sleeping on one side without adequate hip support
- A leg length discrepancy
- Post-surgical scarring or altered mechanics after hip or knee surgery

What Makes It Worse?

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- Lying on the affected hip at night
 - Prolonged walking, especially on uneven terrain
 - Sitting with legs crossed or in a low chair
 - Going upstairs or uphill
 - Stretching the IT band aggressively — counterintuitively makes tendinopathy worse

When Should I Be Concerned?

- Severe swelling or warmth over the hip — possible infected bursa
- Fever accompanying hip pain
- Pain that radiates below the knee — consider lumbar spine or nerve involvement

The Good News

Greater trochanteric bursitis and gluteal tendinopathy respond very well to physical therapy. The key is gluteal strengthening — building the strength of the hip abductors reduces tension on the bursa and tendons dramatically. Most patients achieve significant relief within weeks of a targeted program. Importantly, aggressive IT band stretching should be avoided as it can worsen tendinopathy.

Most patients experience significant relief from outer hip pain within **6 to 10 weeks** of targeted physical therapy.

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