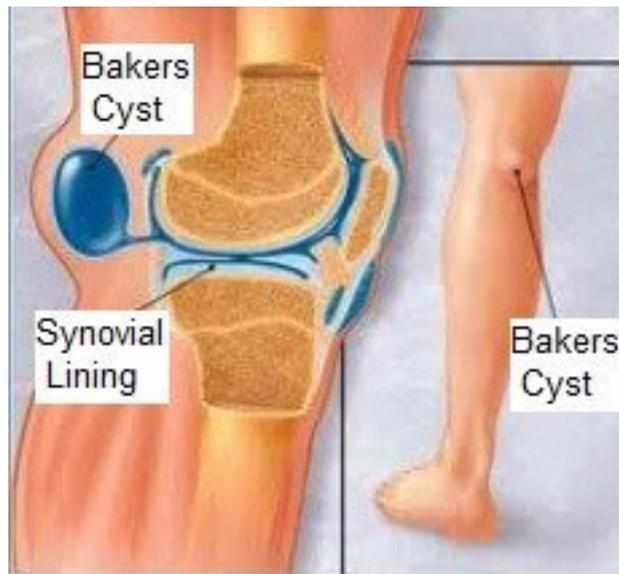


BAKER'S CYST

What is it?

A Baker's cyst is a fluid-filled sac that develops at the back of the knee. It is sometimes referred to as a popliteal cyst. It is caused by a build up of fluid in the knee joint. When the knee joint produces excess synovial fluid (which lubricates the joint) it can cause the bursa (fluid filled sac) behind the knee to bulge and expand. The excess joint fluid results in the



formation of a Baker's cyst.

What causes a Baker's cyst?

Baker's cysts are relatively common and can be due to anything which causes the joint to swell.

- Osteoarthritis is the most common cause, which is degenerative changes to the cartilage and bone in the joint
- Damage to the knee cartilage or a knee injury
- Rheumatoid arthritis which is an inflammatory arthritis caused by the immune system attacking the joints
- Gout, which is a type of arthritis where there is a buildup of the waste product uric acid in the blood that can affect the knee joint.

Baker's cysts are more common in women than men and usually occur in people over the age of 40 but can affect people of any age as well as children.

Symptoms

Symptoms include:

Swelling behind the knee

Pain behind the knee

Tightness at the back of the knee

Knee stiffness

Difficulty moving the knee.

Often the Baker's cyst causes no pain or symptoms. The cyst is often visible as a bulge at the back of the knee. It is normally soft and not tender to touch.

Treatment

Baker's cysts do not normally require treatment especially if they are not associated with any pain. Removing fluid from the cyst is not recommended as more fluid will be produced causing the cyst to recur.

If the knee joint is painful due to osteoarthritis a corticosteroid injection may be administered into the joint for pain relief. Pain killers such as paracetamol or ibuprofen can be used to reduce the pain and swelling. An ice pack may help to reduce swelling. The underlying cause of the Baker's cyst may need to be treated.

Complications

Rupture of the cyst causing swelling and pain in the leg. Rarely the Baker's cyst can burst causing fluid to go into the calf. This can cause pain and swelling in the calf and ankle. These symptoms can resemble those caused by a blood clot so it is important to seek medical advice.

Further management

An onward referral is recommended to either a rheumatologist or an orthopedic surgeon for further assessment and treatment if:

- The diagnosis is not clear
- The symptoms are troublesome in spite of conservative treatment or the cyst is very large
- Further treatment of the underlying disease of the knee joint is required.

Prevention

There is no specific prevention for a Baker's cyst apart from managing any underlying condition such as osteoarthritic disease.

References:

www.arthritisresearchuk.org

www.nhs.uk

nice.org.uk