

Personal Training by Robert J. Bovee

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Iliotibial Band Syndrome

Iliotibial Band Syndrome is one of the leading causes of lateral knee pain in runners. The iliotibial band is a superficial thickening of tissue on the outside of the thigh, extending from the outside of the pelvis, over the hip and knee, and inserting just below the knee. The band is crucial to stabilizing the knee during running, moving from behind the femur to the front of it during the gait cycle. The continual rubbing of the band over the bone, combined with the repeated flexion and extension of the knee during running may cause the area to become inflamed or the band itself may become irritated.

Iliotibial Band Syndrome symptoms range from a stinging sensation just above the knee joint on the outside of the knee or along the entire length of the iliotibial band to swelling and a thickening of the tissue at the point where the band moves over the femur. The pain may not be immediate, but it will worsen during activity when the foot strikes the ground if you over stride or run downhill, and may persist afterward. A single workout of excessive distance or a rapid increase in weekly mileage can aggravate the condition.

Both poor training habits and anatomical abnormalities cause Iliotibial Band Syndrome. The downhill leg is forced to bend slightly inward when running on a banked surface, causing extreme stretching of the band against the femur. An inadequate warm-up or cool-down routine can cause this also. Running excessive distances or increasing your distance too quickly can aggravate or cause injury. Being born bowlegged or with tightness about the iliotibial band are the anatomical abnormalities that would cause the syndrome to develop.

Short Term Treatment: There are several things you can do to treat functional problems due to poor training. Decrease your mileage. Alternate the direction in which you run, especially if you regularly run on a pitched surface like an indoor track or the shoulder of the road. Be sure to be stretching to tolerance. You might try a lateral sole wedge to lessen pressure on the knee. Of course, you should also ice your knee after activity.

Long Term Treatment: For structural abnormalities such as a natural tightness in the band, stretch especially before you workout. This will make the band more flexible and less susceptible to injury. In extreme cases, surgery may be required to relieve the tightness in the band.

Both structural and functional problems need to be considered when treating Iliotibial Band Syndrome.

For more information, please contact Robert J. Bovee at (585) 330-0614.