



IT Band – To Stretch or not to Stretch

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Runners get it. Cyclists get it. Many other athletes get it. On the field or at work, once you get it, it can be difficult to get rid of.

Iliotibial Band Syndrome or ITBS.

A sharp, burning pain in the outside of your knee is the most common symptom and it can be very persistent. ITBS affects 4,500,000 runners each year. Runners make mistakes and they all will try at least this one thing to help to alleviate the symptoms: **stretching**.

The conventional wisdom that the thing to do to relieve pain caused by ITBS is to stretch the iliotibial band (the long tendon on the outside of your thigh) so that it will not continually rub against the end of the femur (the long bone of the thigh) and irritate a bursa (small fluid filled sack designed to protect the tendon. If it rubs enough the tissues become inflamed and you hurt. So, again, stretching should help right? Only trouble is, you can't!

The iliotibial band has tremendous strength and resistance to stretch. In fact, this tendon is stronger than a brick. Imagine trying to stretch a brick.

So, no, stretching the iliotibial band is not the answer to relieving your knee pain. But then what to do?

One of the reasons the ITBS symptoms appear is due to irritation of the knee joint itself; not the IT band. The pain felt on the outside of the knee may be coming from swelling inside the joint. This swelling can cause fluid accumulation under the IT band. The tendon then rubs on the swollen tissue causing pain.

The solution is to improve the health of the joint and reduce the swelling instead of stretching the IT band.

If you are like some of the patients we have seen who have struggled with IT band pain, maybe it's because the problem is not in your IT band; Maybe it's time to stop stretching.

Adapted from Doug Kelsey's "the view from sports center" blog March 2006.

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