

IT Band Friction Syndrome

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There are many beneficial aspects of participating in a cardiovascular training program. These benefits include improved blood pressure, improved blood glucose levels, decreased resting heart rate, better ability to maintain target weight, improved metabolism and even potential improvements in mental faculties and improved lifespan. However, as with any exercise program, there is always the possibility of developing a traumatic or overuse injury. One such overuse injury that is very common in both runners and cyclists is IT Band Friction Syndrome.

What is IT Band Friction Syndrome?

IT Band Friction Syndrome is a common overuse injury that occurs when the IT band becomes very tight and creates excessive friction over the outside of the hip or the outside of the knee. When the IT band becomes tight and you continue to run or cycle, the repetitive friction of the IT band rubbing over the outside of the hip or knee creates irritation, inflammation, and ultimately pain. This pain may prevent you from participating in your cardiovascular exercise until the symptoms are alleviated.

The best way to address IT Band Friction Syndrome is to prevent it from occurring! This is most effectively done with a comprehensive stretching and foam roller program, along with specific hip strengthening exercises. If completed 2-3 times a week, a good maintenance program can do wonders in helping to prevent IT Band Friction Syndrome and other overuse injuries.

What can I do if I get IT Band Friction Syndrome?

The first thing to understand when addressing IT Band Friction Syndrome is the actual anatomy of the IT Band. One common mistake that many people make when trying to self-treat IT Band Friction Syndrome is specifically focusing on stretching the IT band in isolation of any other muscle or muscle group. Instead, start with a comprehensive stretching program that is addressing the gluteus, hamstrings and hip flexors together.

Another common mistake that people often participate in when trying to self-treat IT Band Friction Syndrome, is “massaging” the spot that hurts. While the pain may be on the outside of your knees, the actual problem relates to inflexibility. If you were to start self-massaging the part of the IT band that is inflamed and irritated, you may just further irritate and inflame that tissue! Instead of massaging the painful part of the IT Band, use ice for 10-12 minutes several times a day, as the ice will help decrease some of the inflammation without aggravating the tissue further.

Lastly, IT Band Friction Syndrome is often associated with weakness in the lateral hip stabilizers. This type of muscle weakness tends to be common in runners and cyclists due to the linear aspect of the sport (very little lateral movement). IT Band Syndromes can sometimes become very difficult to fix on one's

own, so if symptoms do not improve after doing these simple tips, consult your physical therapist for a more personal treatment approach based on your specific contributing factors.