

# Iliotibial Band Tendonitis

Quincy Medical Center

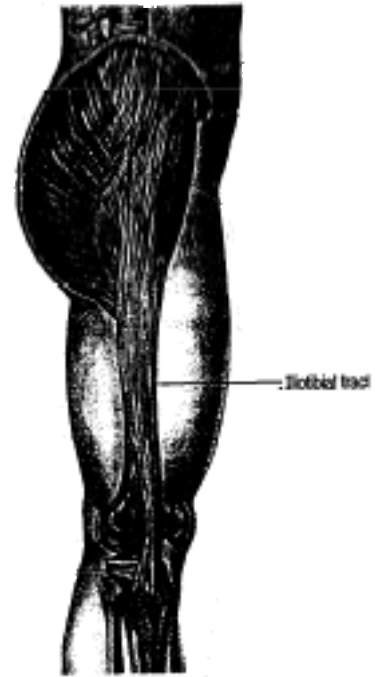
Massachusetts General Hospital

## Eric Berkson, MD

Orthopaedic Surgery of Quincy  
909 Hancock Street  
Quincy MA  
(617) 773-7457

### ANATOMY

The iliotibial band (or tract) is a thick band of tissue that starts on the pelvis and upper thigh and passes along the outside of the knee and attaches to the outer tibia. When the knee moves the iliotibial band slides over a bony prominence on the outer knee (lateral femoral epicondyle). Iliotibial band friction syndrome or iliotibial band tendonitis is a painful condition on the outer (lateral) aspect of the knee that is common in long distance runners.



### INJURY

The iliotibial band friction syndrome is an overuse injury caused by repetitive friction of the iliotibial band crossing the lateral femoral epicondyle. It is a well recognized cause of knee pain in runners, so it is commonly called "**runner's knee**". It can also occur in other athletes.

The average jogger strikes the foot against the ground 3,000 times per mile. This adds up to 60,000 foot impacts for every twenty miles. While running you only have one foot on the ground at a time. When walking, 30 percent of the time, both feet are on the ground. When running, the force of landing has been estimated to be about three times your body weight. This means that if you weigh 150 pounds, the force in your leg when you land is around 450 pounds. Shoe mileage should also be considered. After 500 miles most shoes retain less than 60% of their initial shock absorption capacity.

When cycling, with each pedaling stroke, the iliotibial band slides over the lateral femoral epicondyle. Knee flexion and extension occur approximately 4800 times an hour (at an average cadence of 80 revolutions per minute), so the iliotibial band is susceptible to repetitive irritation.

### Treatment

The injury is the result of too much running. In the simplest terms, if you stop running, the injury will eventually heal. There are ways, however to continue to run if you modify your training schedule and technique.

Initial treatment has two objectives: to reduce the inflammation and to allow the iliotibial band to heal. When the knee is painful and swollen, you must rest it. Avoid activities that aggravate the pain. Reduce your activity to a pain free level. Keep your knee straight while sitting, and avoid repetitive squatting. Let pain be your guide. Mild discomfort or ache is not a problem but do not do activities that cause definite pain.

**Ice your knee for 20 minutes, two or three times a day and after any sporting activities** apply a bag of crushed ice over a towel. This reduces swelling, inflammation and pain. Aspirin, Aleve or Advil sometimes helps to relieve pain and reduce inflammation. A physical therapist or the doctor can recommend exercises to strengthen the muscles. Exercises can also be used to stretch and balance the thigh muscles. In rare cases surgery may be indicated.

## Sports

Use your judgment. When your knees hurt, avoid sports that may aggravate your knee problems. Total elimination of running may be required for a while. When your knee is better, you should be able to return to most sports.

**Sports that aggravate iliotibial band syndrome:** distance running, cycling, volleyball, basketball, soccer, racquetball, squash, football, weightlifting (squats).

**Sports that may or may not cause symptoms:** baseball, hockey, skiing and tennis.

**Sports that are easiest on the knees:** Swimming (especially with a flutter kick), walking (avoid up and down hills), and cross-country skiing.

Although many sports can cause or aggravate the iliotibial band, running is the main culprit. It is better to vary your running schedule and use interval training: run sprints three days a week, intermediate distance two days a week and long distance once a week.

## EXERCISES

The following **exercise program** should be followed as instructed by the doctor or physical therapist. For the straight leg lift and short arc lift, ankle weights can be added to increase resistance and strength of the quadriceps. Generally, after one or two weeks, ankle weights can be added (starting at one pound) and increased by one pound per week until you build to five pounds. The exercises should be done daily until ankle weights are added. At this time, the straight-leg lift, short-arc lift and wall slides should be done every other day and the stretches should continue daily. When you have built up to five pounds on the straight-leg and short-arc lifts, continue the exercises two times per week for maintenance.

### STRAIGHT LEG LIFT

Tighten the quadriceps muscles so that the knee is flat, straight and fully extended.

Try to raise the entire involved limb up off of the floor or bed. If you are able to keep the knee straight raise the limb to about 45 degrees, pause one second and then lower slowly to the bed. Relax and repeat. If the knee bends when you attempt to lift the limb off of the bed, do not do this exercise. Keep trying to do the quadriceps setting exercise until you can lift the limb without letting the knee bend. Repeat twenty times.



### SHORT ARC LIFT

With the knee bent over a rolled up towel or blanket, lift the foot so that the knee fully straightens. Hold the knee locked in extension for five seconds, then slowly lower. Repeat twenty times.



### **STANDING HAMSTRING CURL**

Stand facing a table, using the table for balance and support. While standing on the uninvolved limb bend the knee of the operated side and raise the heel toward the buttock. Hold this flexed position for one second. Slowly lower the foot back to the floor. Keep the thighs aligned as illustrated. Repeat twenty times.



### **STANDING TOE RAISE**

Stand facing a table, hands on the table for support and balance. Keep the knees extended fully. Tighten the quadriceps to hold the knee fully straight. Raise up on 'tip-toes' while maintaining the knees in full extension. Hold for one second, then lower slowly to the starting position. Repeat twenty times.

### **HIP ABDUCTION**

Lie on your uninvolved side. Keep the knees fully extended. Raise the operated limb upward to a 45 degree angle as illustrated. Hold one second, and then lower slowly. Repeat twenty times



### **WALL SLIDES**

Stand upright with your back and buttocks touching a wall. Place the feet about 12 inches apart and about 6 inches from the wall. Slowly lower your hips by bending the knees and slide down the wall until the knees are flexed about 45 degrees (illustration). Pause five seconds and then slowly slide back up to the upright starting position. Doing this exercise too fast or too deep can aggravate your pain. Do not do this exercise if there is crunching or cracking at the kneecap or if it is painful. Do three sets of ten to fifteen repetitions.

### **HAMSTRING STRETCH**

Perform this stretch in the position illustrated at the right. Bend slowly forward at the hips, keeping the knee fully extended until you feel gentle stretch in the back of your thigh and knee. Hold the stretch for fifteen to twenty seconds and repeat three to five times.



## QUADRICEPS STRETCH

This stretch is performed in the position illustrated at the right. Lean gently backward as if bringing your heel toward the buttock. When a stretch is felt in the front of the thigh and knee, hold fifteen to twenty seconds for three to five repetitions.



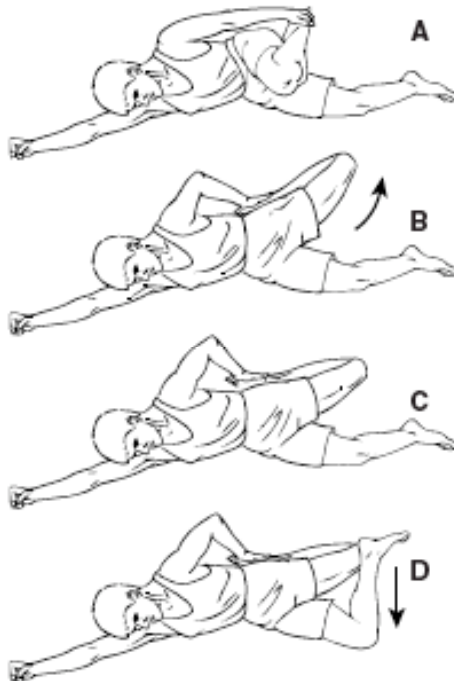
## CALF STRETCH

In the position illustrated, keep the heel flat on the floor and the knee fully extended. Lean forward at the hips with the arms supporting your weight. When you feel a gentle stretch in the back of your calf and knee, hold for fifteen to twenty seconds, three to five repetitions.



## LATERAL HIP AND THIGH STRETCH ( for the iliotibial band)

Cross your left (right) leg over in front of the other. Lean to the left (right), bending at the waist and letting your right (left) hip jut out. When you feel a gentle stretch in the out side of hip, hold fifteen to twenty seconds, three to five repetitions.



## ILIOTIBIAL BAND STRETCH

Lie on your side as shown. The muscle/iliotibial band to be stretched should be on top. With your hand, grasp your ankle and pull your heel to your buttocks and bend your hip so that your knee is pointing forward as in the top drawing (A). Rotate your hip up so that your thigh is away from your body as shown and in line with your body. Keep your heel to your buttocks (B). Bring the thigh back down and behind your body. Do not bend at the waist. Keep your heel pressed to your buttocks (C). Place the heel of your opposite foot on top of your knee and pull the knee/thigh down farther. You should feel a stretch on the outside of your thigh near your kneecap (D).