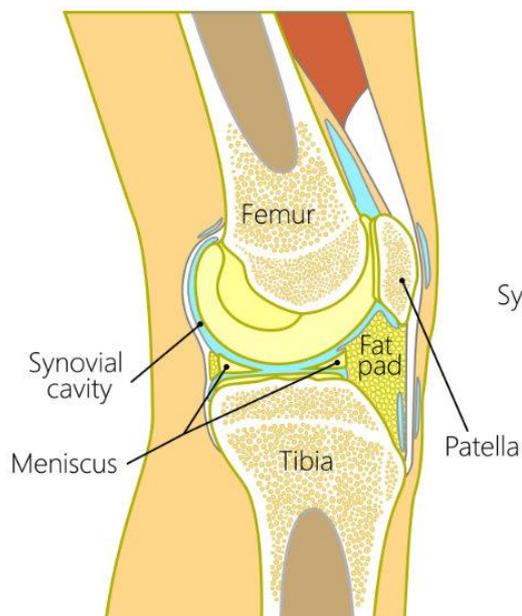
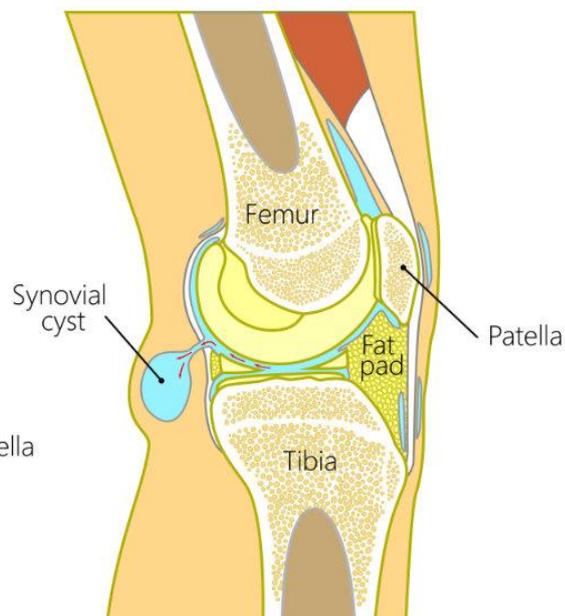


## Baker's Cyst (Popliteal Cyst)

HEALTHY KNEE JOINT  
Sagittal section of the knee



BAKER'S CYST  
Sagittal section of the knee



### What is a Baker's cyst?

A Baker's cyst, also known as a popliteal cyst, is a fluid-filled swelling that develops at the back of the knee. It occurs when excess joint fluid is pushed into a small sac behind the knee.

A Baker's cyst is **not dangerous** and is often linked to an underlying knee problem rather than being a condition on its own.

### What causes a Baker's cyst?

Baker's cysts usually develop due to increased fluid inside the knee joint. Common causes include:

- Osteoarthritis
- Rheumatoid arthritis
- Meniscus (cartilage) tears
- Knee injury or inflammation
- Other causes of knee swelling

The body produces extra fluid to protect the knee, which can collect behind the joint.

### **Common symptoms**

Symptoms vary and some people have no symptoms at all. Possible symptoms include:

- Swelling or lump behind the knee
- Tightness or pressure at the back of the knee
- Stiffness, especially when straightening or bending the knee
- Discomfort that may worsen after activity

The cyst may change in size and can sometimes disappear on its own.

### **Is it serious?**

Most Baker's cysts are harmless. Rarely, a cyst can leak or rupture, causing:

- Sudden pain in the calf
- Swelling and redness in the lower leg

These symptoms can mimic a blood clot (DVT). **Seek urgent medical advice** if this happens.

### **How is a Baker's cyst diagnosed?**

Diagnosis is usually based on:

- Your symptoms
- Physical examination

Ultrasound or MRI scans are not always needed but may be used if the diagnosis is unclear or another condition is suspected.

### **Treatment and management**

Treatment focuses on managing the underlying knee condition rather than the cyst itself.

### **Self-management**

- Keep active but avoid activities that significantly increase pain or swelling
- Gentle knee movement and strengthening exercises
- Rest and elevate the leg during flare-ups
- Use ice packs for swelling (10–15 minutes, with a cloth between ice and skin)

### **Physiotherapy**

A physiotherapist can help by:

- Improving knee strength and flexibility
- Reducing stiffness
- Advising on safe activity levels

### **Pain relief**

- Simple pain relief such as paracetamol
- Anti-inflammatory medications or gels (if appropriate and advised by a healthcare professional)

### **Other treatments**

In some cases:

- Treating arthritis or inflammation in the knee
- Steroid injection into the knee joint (not the cyst)

Draining the cyst is rarely recommended, as it often returns.

### **Do I need surgery?**

Surgery is **very rarely needed** for a Baker's cyst and is only considered if there is a significant underlying knee problem that has not improved with other treatment.

### **When should I seek medical advice?**

Contact your GP or physiotherapist if:

- Knee pain or swelling is worsening
- The cyst is rapidly increasing in size
- You have difficulty walking or bending the knee

Seek **urgent medical attention** if you develop sudden calf pain, redness, or swelling.

### **Key messages**

- A Baker's cyst is common and usually harmless
- It is often linked to another knee condition
- Exercise and movement are safe and helpful
- Treatment focuses on the knee, not just the cyst

If you have concerns or questions, please speak to your healthcare professional.