

Greater Trochanteric Pain Syndrome (GTPS)

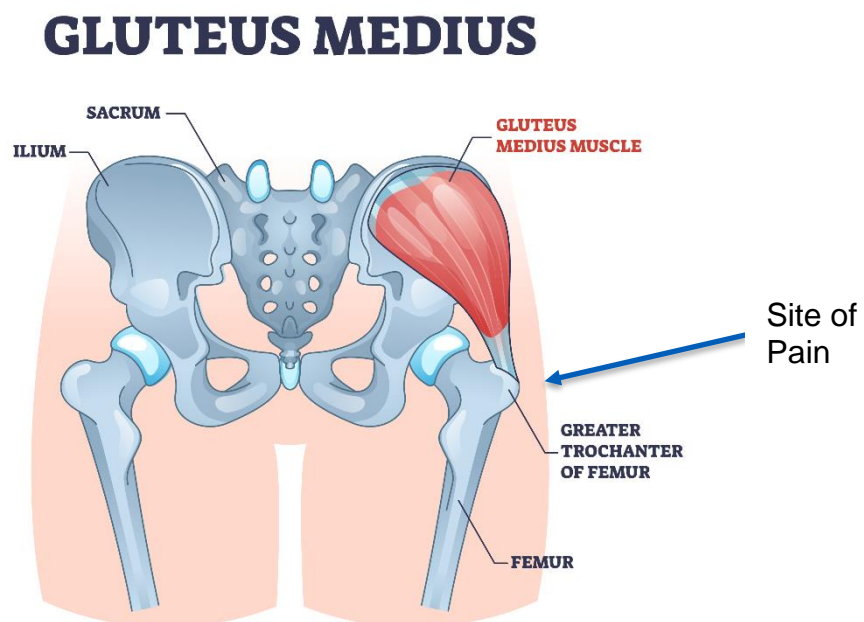
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What is greater trochanteric pain syndrome (GTPS)?

Greater trochanteric pain syndrome (GTPS) is a blanket term used to describe pain around the outside of your hip (lateral hip pain). You may also hear it referred to as 'trochanteric bursitis' or 'gluteal tendinopathy' as the condition often involves these tissues. It can cause pain on the outside of your hip that may travel down the outer side of your thigh. Although the word 'bursitis' suggests there is inflammation, most research shows that there is usually very little to no inflammation.

It is a relatively common condition that more often affects people between the ages of 40 and 60 and is more common in women than men. However, it can also occur in younger or older people.



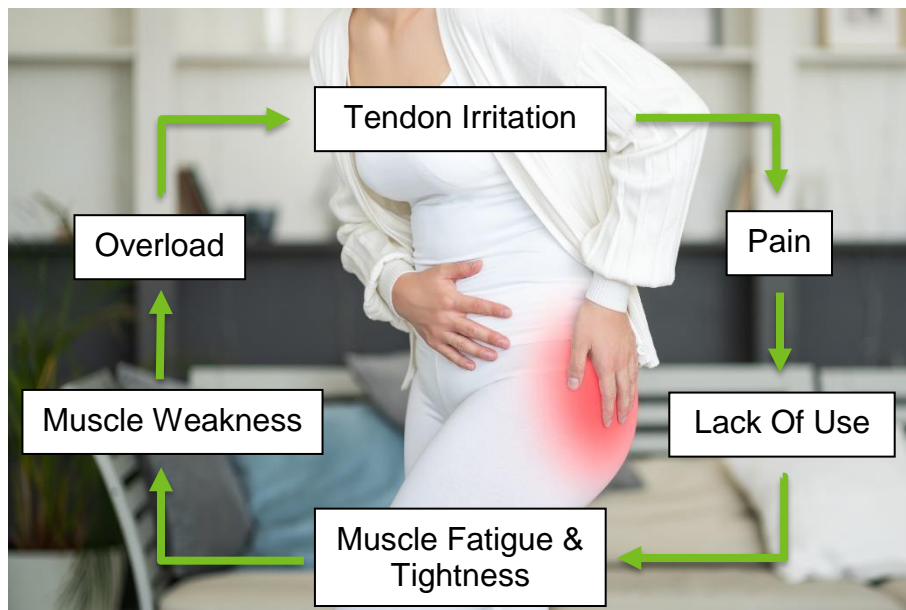
What can cause GTPS?

Around the outside of the hip and thigh, there are many soft tissue structures such as muscles, tendons, fascia and bursas. They all help to support and control the hip. If there is weakness in the muscles in this area, it can often lead to an overloading of these soft tissue structures, which can then lead to pain. Often these symptoms come on gradually but may also come on after an injury.

Tendon health depends on activities they are used for on a regular basis, and either too much or too little activity can be problematic. For example, an athlete may overload the tendon and end up with tendon problems, whereas those who are not physically active may well suffer gradual changes to the tendon, which can cause pain or discomfort.

Either way, if the tendon health suffers, pain may be experienced when the tendon is expected to do more than it is used to. For example, suddenly increasing activity taking up walking, particularly up hills/stairs, or with a slip or fall directly landing on the side of the hip.

Often you may not be able to put your finger on a single factor as it may have occurred as a result of a number of small things. For example, a gradual increase in body weight over time and a reduction in general fitness could cause these symptoms to occur.



What are the common symptoms of GTPS?

Pain around the outside of your hip that may radiate down the side of the thigh.

Many people describe a deep ache or burning sensation.

The pain can be aggravated by activities such as walking uphill, running, climbing stairs, lying on the affected side, standing on one leg or getting out of low chairs or car seats.

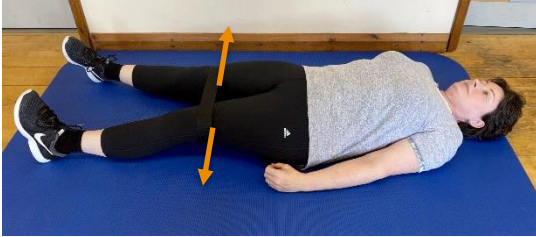
Other areas of the body e.g. spine or pelvis, can give similar symptoms. If you feel that this may be the case, it would be advisable to see your GP or a physiotherapist if you have not already done so. This is especially advisable if you are experiencing any pins and needles or numbness in addition to your pain.

What can help?

- Rest does not cure tendon issues but exercising into high pain is also not helpful. Keeping up a walking programme that does not aggravate your symptoms may be worthwhile. Walk on the flat, avoid hills and keep stairs to a minimum until your pain settles. Also try to avoid over striding during this time. Start with 10 minutes of walking, and as your pain improves, gradually build up your activity levels. Pacing your activity can improve symptom control and also help to reduce flare ups. When undertaking a walking programme, monitor symptoms at night and the next day to check symptoms have not been aggravated.
- Losing weight if you are overweight can help to improve your symptoms.
- If you smoke, seek support to help stop smoking. Smoking can have a large impact on the health of our muscles, tendons and circulation, and may slow progress with recovery.
- To reduce compression of the area, avoid crossing your legs or ankles while standing or sitting, or lying on the painful side, and avoid sitting on low chairs or on the floor. Also avoid sitting with your knees together and feet apart. Place a thick pillow between the legs if lying on the non-painful side. Ideally lie on your back, and a small pillow under the knees may help also.
- When standing, ensure your weight is equally spread between both legs i.e. don't hang on one hip, and reduce time stood on one leg for activities e.g. sit down to put on socks and trousers rather than standing.
- Either heat or cold can be used to help pain. Use a bag of frozen peas wrapped in a damp tea towel for up to 15 minutes, or alternatively try a hot water bottle in a cover. Use whatever gets the best results for you. Make sure to regularly check your skin to avoid skin damage. This should not be used if you have any sensation or circulation issues in the area.
- Medication – You may be prescribed simple pain relief or anti-inflammatory medication. Take this as prescribed until the pain settles. An alternative is to use a topical anti-inflammatory gel, on which your GP or pharmacist can advise you.
- Exercise – Strengthening muscles around the hip and back can help. Your physiotherapist will assess this and guide you with a personally tailored exercise programme. To get started now, you may find the following exercises beneficial. Avoid stretches for your bottom muscles and for the side of your leg.

A guide to how hard you should be working is dependent upon your pain levels. For example, if we use a pain scale of 0 to 10 (0 = no pain and 10 = worst pain imaginable), keep at or below a maximum of 4-5 on that scale. Any increased discomfort or pain should settle within 30 minutes of completing the exercises.

Exercises for GTPS



Starting position: Lying on your back on the floor/bed, knees just slightly wider than hip width. Pillow under the knees, belt/scarf around lower thighs.

Action: Now very slowly and gently start to move your knees apart, but only enough to just take up the slack in the belt. This may only be 1-2mm of movement.

Hold time: 10-20 seconds. Relax slowly.

Number of repetitions: 5



Starting position: Standing feet slightly wider than your hips.

Action: Slowly and gently imagine you are going to slide your legs apart – '*Imaginary splits*'. Think of a slow 'ramp' of muscle tension, rather than a fast movement. You should only be aware of a deep gentle tension at the side of your hips/buttocks.

Hold time: 10-20 seconds. Relax slowly

Number of repetitions: 5



Starting position: Lie on your back with your knees bent, feet flat on the floor/bed with heels as close to your bottom as comfortable.

Action: Draw in your lower abdomen gently. Contract your buttocks. Press your heels into the bed (ankles/toes stay relaxed), and lift your pelvis/bottom from the bed. Do not fully straighten the hips – no need to lift that high. Only lift in a comfortable range – this may be only just taking the pressure off your buttocks initially. There must be no discomfort in the lower back. Use one flat pillow to avoid strain of the neck if needed.

Hold time: 3-5 seconds

Number of repetitions: 10

Progression: Bring one foot in closer to the buttock, and place the other foot further away.



Starting position: Stand in front of a chair with your weight equally on both feet, weight two thirds on the heels, and thighs and buttocks relaxed.

Action: Now bend at the hips and knees, moving the hips backwards to sit on the chair. Keep your knees facing straight ahead – like 'headlights'. Move slowly down over around 3-4 seconds, then return slowly to standing over 3-4 seconds, focusing on pushing through your heels and feeling the tension in your buttocks. As you reach the top again, grow tall into that good posture.

Number of repetitions: 10

Progression: As above but only touching your bottom lightly on the chair before returning to a standing position.



starting position: Start with good standing posture and feet hip width apart.

Action: Now practice some controlled sidestepping side to side.

The focus should be on a controlled push from one side and landing softly and with control on the other. The upper body should remain upright, and the kneecaps facing straight ahead.

When stepping feet closer together, only step back to hip width apart. Do NOT bring ankles together.

Number of repetitions: 10 steps each way.

Managing flare-ups

Flare-ups are a common part of the recovery process. Here are some top tips to help you if you are experiencing a flare-up:

- Think about what helped last time
- Continue your exercises with modification if required e.g. reduce number of repetitions for a few sessions
- Hurt **does not** mean harm
- Resting for long periods can make it worse and lead to other problems
- Take pain killers **regularly** (discuss with your GP or pharmacist where required)
- Practice relaxation techniques
- Use heat or ice as previously explained
- Gradually try to get back to normal activities over the space of several weeks

Further information

Useful websites:

One Small Step Devon

FREE weight loss support
<https://onesmallstep.org.uk/services/healthy-weight/>

FREE smoking cessation support
<https://onesmallstep.org.uk/services/stop-smoking/>

PALS

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