Baker's Cyst

A Baker's cyst is a fluid-filled swelling behind the knee. The lump looks most obvious when the child is standing with their knee straight (*Figure 1*). The area at the back of the knee is called the 'popliteal space', so a Baker's cyst is also called a 'popliteal cyst'.

Baker's cysts occur more commonly in boys between 4–8 years old. They present as a painless lump behind the knee and usually affect only one leg.

Baker's cysts are caused by an extra collection of fluid inside the bursa between the calf muscle and the knee joint *(Figure 2)*. A bursa is a small pouch or sac of fluid found where tendons attach to bones. They help to cushion and reduce friction between tissues during joint movement.

Baker's cysts can develop in children for no apparent reason and the child will usually have no symptoms. However, some children may report a feeling of tightness or pressure at the back of the knee joint when it is straight, or an aching in the knee after strenuous activity. It is common for the cyst to vary in size from day to day.

A Baker's cyst is usually diagnosed by clinical examination. Shining a light through the cyst can also determine if the lump is filled with fluid so it is usually not necessary for an ultrasound test or CT scan to be made for diagnosis.

Treatment of Baker's cysts in children is usually not necessary. The natural history of Baker's cysts in children is that they disappear spontaneously, but the time in which they do so is variable. They will often get bigger before they finally resolve and there are no long-term problems to the knee.

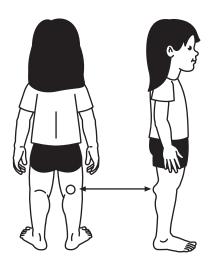


Figure 1. Baker's cyst is most obvious when the child is standing.

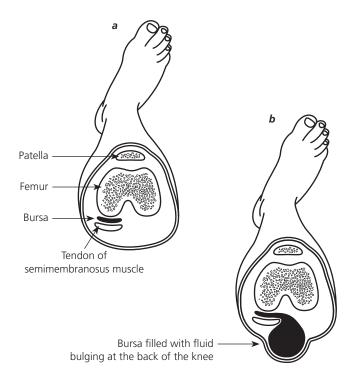


Figure 2. Cross-section of knee demonstrating normal anatomy (a) and Baker's cyst (b).