



# Greater Trochanteric Pain Syndrome

Patient Information  
Physiotherapy



## WHAT IS GREATER TROCHANTERIC PAIN SYNDROME?

Greater trochanteric pain syndrome (GTPS) is a common condition characterised by pain along the outer side of your thigh/buttock. This is usually caused by an injury or irritation to the muscles, tendons and bursa that lie over the top of your outer thigh bone.

GTPS was previously more commonly known as trochanteric bursitis as it was thought that pain was mainly related to inflammation of the bursa (fluid filled sac that cushions between bone and tendons).

More recent research has shown that pain in this area is also due to small repetitive injuries to the buttock muscles and tendons. So rather than trochanteric Bursitis, Greater trochanteric pain syndrome better describes the condition.

# WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS OF GREATER TROCHANTERIC PAIN SYNDROME?

Pain is felt on the outside of your hip/thigh/buttock area.

Symptoms can vary for different people but you may commonly experience pain with one or more of the following:

- ❖ Lying on your side
- ❖ When you are walking
- ❖ Climbing the stairs
- ❖ When you are standing on the affected leg for a long time
- ❖ After longer periods of sitting
- ❖ When you stand up after sitting
- ❖ Crossing your legs
- ❖ With a smaller amount of physical exercise or activity than you are normally able to do

## HOW COMMON IS GTPS?

You are more likely to develop GTPS if:

- ❖ You are female (4 times as many women get GTPS than men)
- ❖ You are aged between 40-60 years old
- ❖ Up to 35% of people with lower back pain will also have GTPS

It's quite common – between 10-25% of the population will have it at some point in their lives.

## WHAT CAUSES GTPS?

There are a number of different reasons why you might develop GTPS. These will vary from person to person but common causes are:

- ❖ A fall on to your hip
- ❖ Excessive/sudden increase in physical activity or repetitive movements
- ❖ Crossing your legs
- ❖ Sitting for long periods
- ❖ Sitting in chairs that are too low
- ❖ Standing/weight bearing more through one leg for longer periods
- ❖ Reduced strength of the muscles around your hip
- ❖ Secondary to osteoarthritis of the hip/knee
- ❖ Having low back pain
- ❖ Morphology (shape) of the pelvis
- ❖ Being overweight
- ❖ An inactive lifestyle

Combinations of the above may lead to the development of GTPS as they put more repetitive friction/stress and weight through the gluteal muscles, tendons and bursa.

# WHAT CAN HELP WITH GTPS?

## Timescales/prognosis

You might find GTPS takes a long time to get better. On average it can take 6-9 months and in some cases longer. You need to have patience and make sure you follow these steps.

The initial and most effective approach to treating GTPS includes:

- ❖ With guidance from your GP or Pharmacist take medications to manage the pain
- ❖ Balance your physical activity levels at work and home
- ❖ Modify your day to day activities and avoid repetitive movements that might make your GTPS worse
- ❖ Do exercises to strengthen the muscles of your hip
- ❖ Maintain a healthy body weight
- ❖ Manage other health conditions that you have

In a small number of people with GTPS, surgery and corticosteroid injections may be considered. However, research has showed these to be less effective in improving the symptoms and are only considered when all the above steps have failed.

## Pain management

- ❖ Try to keep active and continue gentle exercise. Avoiding all activity can make the pain worse over time. Continue to exercise as long as it is not making the pain significantly worse.
- ❖ Try to stay at work, speak with your employer and modify your duties if necessary.
- ❖ To manage pain, you can apply ice wrapped in a towel directly on the area for up to 20mins.
- ❖ The use of painkillers and anti-inflammatory medications can be used as advised by your pharmacist or family doctor (GP).

- ❖ In extreme cases or cases which do not get better with time and exercise, corticosteroid injections may be used. This can be discussed with your Physiotherapist or GP

## Helpful tips

It's good to keep active, however if activity is making symptoms worse avoid overdoing it.

- ❖ You could try using a pedometer to monitor how many steps you take each day. Keep a diary on how you feel based on how many steps you have taken. Try to reduce your steps if it makes your pain worse. Over time try to slowly add the steps back in.
- ❖ If exercises are making your symptoms worse then try to make some changes. First try to reduce how much exercise you are doing, then try to slowly reintroduce that exercise over time. Also consider different forms of exercise such as swimming or cycling which may put less stress on your hip.

Try to be mindful of your postures and body positions during the day.

- ❖ Avoid sitting with legs crossed for long periods
- ❖ Avoid sitting with knee wide apart or too close together for long periods
- ❖ Try to change positions frequently throughout the day
- ❖ Avoid standing with your weight on the one leg or pushing one hip out to the side
- ❖ Avoid very low chairs
- ❖ When going up stairs take one step at a time or use hand rail if needed.
- ❖ Limit walking up steep hills where possible

Sleeping positions can cause discomfort at night. Try out the following positions and find the most comfortable.



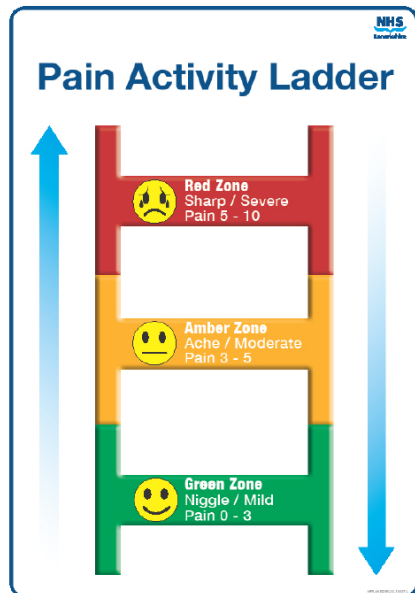
- ❖ Try laying on your back with pillow under your knees to take the pressure off your hip.
- ❖ Try laying on your side with painful side up and a pillow between your legs.

## PACING AND SPACING

- ❖ Pacing and spacing methods can help you manage your pain better.
- ❖ Pacing is the term used for breaking down an activity or task. This can be done by taking regular breaks. Prioritising daily activities and deciding which ones are the most important for you to do can also help. This can prevent “over stimulating” your pain system.
- ❖ When you complete challenging tasks or activities, it may be useful to set a “baseline”. This is the amount you can manage on a good or bad day without making your symptoms worse. This way you can plan rests and set achievable goals.

## PAIN ACTIVITY LADDER

- ❖ By following the pain activity ladder (an video explanation can be found here <https://youtu.be/e9SEqd8bvII>) which can be seen below, you can identify activities that you would consider severely painful, moderately painful and mildly irritating and act to change your habits.
- ❖ The pain scale, most often used in healthcare, measures pain from 0-10 (zero being no pain and 10 representing the worst pain you could imagine).
- ❖ If you can identify the level of pain you are experiencing, you will find out if you are in the green, amber or red zone. The best way to move down to the green zone is by pacing and spacing your activity.
- ❖ When you are completing your rehabilitation exercises it is often best to work within the green (and sometimes amber zones depending on what you decide is an acceptable level of pain) both during the exercises and within 48 hours of completing your exercises. If you find yourself in the red zone you are likely pushing yourself too hard and may flare up the pain.





Exercises to strengthen the muscles around the painful area are the most effective treatment for GTPS. Strengthening the muscles of your hip will reduce your pain over time. If you are attending physiotherapy your therapist will advise you further.

It is normal to experience some discomfort or pain during rehabilitation exercises and for a short time after. However this should settle within a relatively short period of time. The Pain Activity Ladder can be used as a useful guide to what level of pain may be acceptable.

When completing the exercises please start with the early exercises. When you find these easy then you may progress to the middle exercises and then the late exercises as you feel able to.

## EXERCISES

Below are some exercises which will help strengthen the affected muscles and over time help reduce the pain. If you are seeing a physiotherapist they will advise you further on these.

### Early strengthening

Standing side onto the wall with the affected leg closest to a wall. Put your hand against the wall for balance. Press the foot of the affected leg against the wall and hold for 30 seconds. Repeat 3-5 times once per day.



### Middle strengthening

Lay on your back on the bed or the floor with your knees bent. Place a belt around your knees. Push your knees firmly into the belt and push your hips up lifting your buttocks off the floor. Hold for 5 seconds then lower back down. Repeat up to 15 times and do 3 sets of this exercise once a day.



### **Middle Strengthening**

Lie on your good side, painful leg on top and supported on a pillow or rolled up towel. Lift the painful leg a couple of centimetres off the pillow and hold for 5 seconds then lower back down. Repeat up to 15 times and do 3 sets of this exercise once a day.



### **Middle Balance**

Stand holding onto a chair or worktop. Lift one leg off the floor, stand on one leg and hold for 30 seconds. Do 3-5 sets of this exercise once a day.



### **Late Strengthening**

Use a towel on a wood or tile floor. Place your foot on top of the towel. Place your hand on the wall for balance. Push your foot firmly in to the towel and push your foot out to the side. Repeat up to 15 times and do 3 sets of this exercise once a day.



### Late Strengthening

Stand in front of a chair with your feet shoulder width apart. Raise your arm out in front of your body, lower your bottom down and back towards the chair as far as you feel comfortable. Try to keep your knees apart. Repeat up to 15 times and do 3 sets of this exercise once a day.



### Late Strengthening

Stand in front of a step, Step one foot up on to the step and then bring opposite foot up on to the step. Step your foot back off the step and bring your other back down beside it. Repeat up to 15 times and do 3 sets of this exercise once a day.





## WEIGHT MANAGEMENT

A good indicator of whether you need to lose weight is your body mass index (BMI).

You can check this here:

<https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/healthy-weight/bmi-calculator/>

If your BMI states you are overweight or obese it is likely that losing weight will reduce your symptoms. Carrying extra fat also increases your risk of heart disease, stroke, type 2 diabetes, and some cancers. Reducing your portion sizes and eating a balanced diet can be helpful in reducing weight. Click on this link for NHS informs online free 12-week weight management programme to get you started right away.

<https://www.nhsinform.scot/healthy-living/12-week-weight-management-programme#Week1>

If you need a little more help and feel that you would benefit from working with others in group sessions NHS Lanarkshire's Weigh to Go programme will help you become more active, eat well and lead a healthier lifestyle. Follow this link for Weight-to-go groups in North and South Lanarkshire <https://www.nhslanarkshire.scot.nhs.uk/weigh-to-go/>

## SMOKING

Smoking can affect how your body recovers from musculoskeletal problems. If you smoke then the good news is that by stopping smoking it can improve your health in many different ways.

Giving up smoking is not something you have to do on your own. You're twice as likely to stop smoking successfully if you get the right support from the NHS. There is a free NHS stop smoking service available in Lanarkshire to help you succeed:

<https://www.nhslanarkshire.scot.nhs.uk/services/quit-your-way/>

## CHRONIC PAIN

Some people will have pain which persists beyond the expected time frame for their condition. For further information on this and how best to manage it please visit <https://www.nhslanarkshire.scot.nhs.uk/services/chronic-pain/>.

Pain association Scotland is a national charity that delivers professionally led self-management pain education in the community. For more information please click on the following link: <https://painassociation.co.uk/>

## MENTAL WELLBEING

It is very important to look after your own mental wellbeing. This can have an influence on your recovery or management of your Musculoskeletal problem. For more information on mental wellbeing please click on the following link  
<https://www.nhslanarkshire.scot.nhs.uk/services/mental-wellbeing/>

## WORK

We know that staying in work or returning to work as soon as possible is good for your mental and physical health. If you have problems with activities at work, it may be helpful to ask for a workstation/workplace assessment or talk with your manager or Occupational Health Department. This can help with alterations or provision of equipment or altering your working day or tasks. There are organisations which can support you at work or help you return to work – you can ask your physiotherapist or Occupational Therapist for information.

## WHEN TO SPEAK TO A HEALTH PROFESSIONAL

Please see your GP as soon as possible, IF:

- ❖ you have a very high temperature feel hot and/or shivery
- ❖ you cannot move the affected joint
- ❖ If your symptoms continue to worsen or do not show signs of improvement after a period of 6-12 weeks of following the advice above, a self-referral to physiotherapy can be made on our website:  
<https://www.nhslanarkshire.scot.nhs.uk/services/physiotherapy-msk/>  
or via your GP.



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