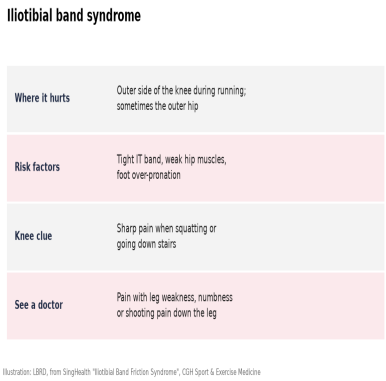


Outer knee pain on the run: what CGH and SGH say about iliotibial band syndrome before marathon weekend

Description

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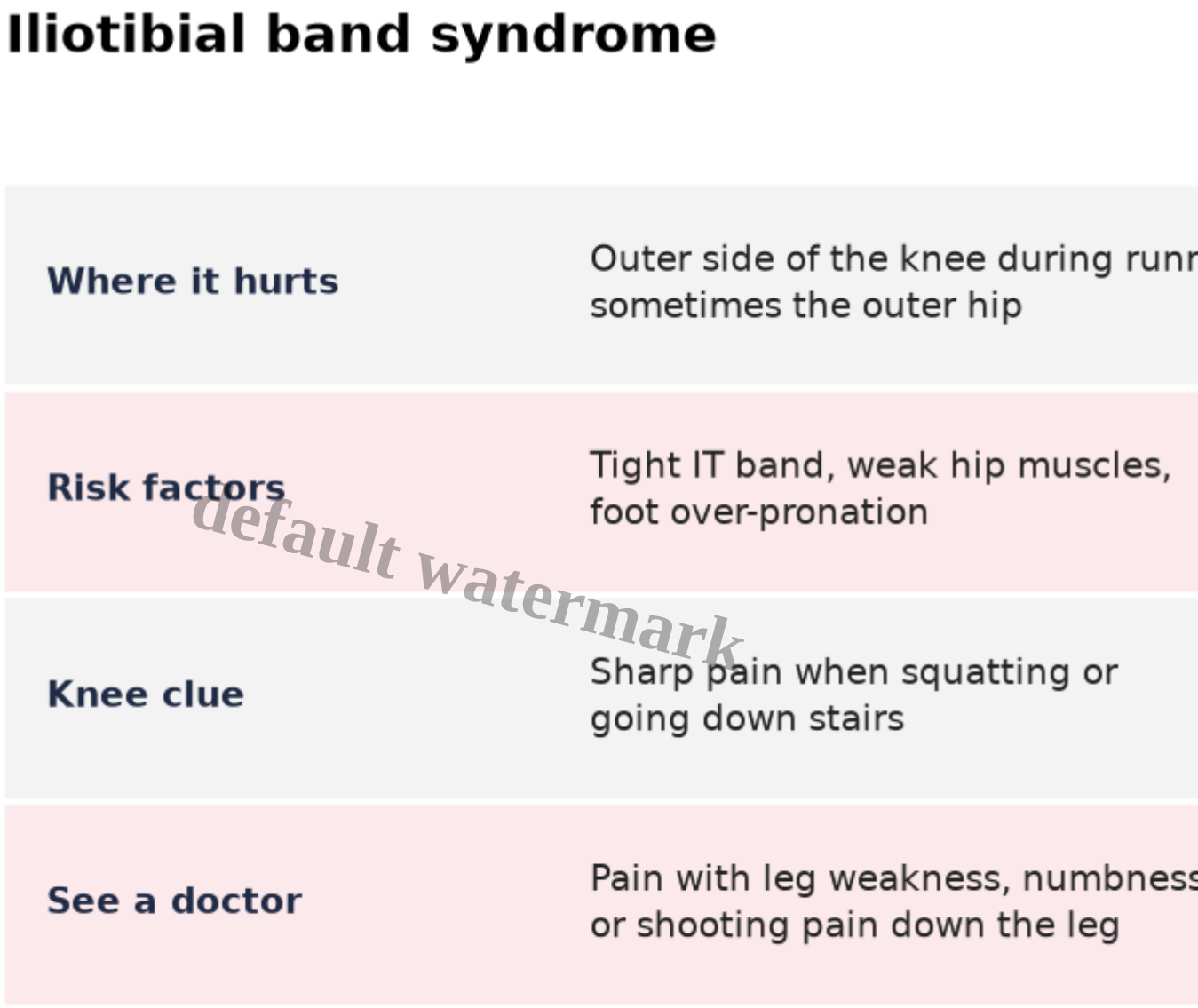
Pain over the outer side of the knee during running is how Changi General Hospital (CGH) describes iliotibial band syndrome (ITBS), a problem Singapore General Hospital (SGH) says long-distance runners are more prone to. The 2026 BYD Singapore International Marathon runs from 4 to 6 December, so here is what the two hospitals advise. This is general information, not medical advice.

What the IT band is, and why it hurts

The iliotibial band is a thick band of tissue running down the outer thigh, across the hip and knee joints, that helps control the angle of the leg when you run. CGHâ??s Sport and Exercise Medicine team, writing for SingHealth, explains that repeated rubbing of the band over the bursae, small fluid-filled cushions, causes pain on the outer side of the knee during running. SGHâ??s physiotherapists describe it as the band thickening and rubbing against the knee bone, causing inflammation, and note that long-distance runners are more prone to it.

CGH lists three risk factors:

- A tight IT band
- Weak hip muscles
- Over-pronation, where the foot rolls inwards



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Iliotibial band syndrome at a glance. Illustration: LBRD, from SingHealth (CGH Sport and Exercise Medicine)

Symptoms

Pain can be felt over the outer hip or the outer knee. At the hip, crossing the affected leg sometimes brings it on. At the knee, there can be sharp pain when squatting or walking down stairs.

CGH says hip or knee pain that comes with leg weakness, numbness or shooting pain down the leg needs medical attention and a thorough evaluation.

What you can do

CGHâ??s self-care advice is to apply a cold pack for 10 to 15 minutes at a time on the painful area, or take pain medication, and to cut back how long and how hard you run while the pain lasts. SGH suggests icing the area for 15 minutes.

SGHâ??s Department of Physiotherapy gives two home exercises:

- **IT band stretch:** stand with your right leg crossed behind your left and lean to the left, keeping your right foot pressed to the floor, until you feel a stretch along the outside of the right leg from hip to knee. Repeat on the other side.
- **Hip strengthener:** lie on your left side, lift your right leg above hip level and take it behind you to a 30 to 45 degree angle. Hold for 5 to 10 seconds and repeat 15 to 30 times, then switch sides.

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Self-care steps for ITBS. Illustration: LBRD, from SingHealth (CGH) and HealthXchange (SGH Physiotherapy)

What a clinic can do

If it does not settle, CGH says a sports physiotherapist can assess your running biomechanics and teach IT band stretches and leg-strengthening exercises. A doctor may prescribe pain medication for short-term relief, and corticosteroids, which are anti-inflammatory medicines, can be injected into the bursa for pain relief. If abnormal foot mechanics are contributing, orthotics may be prescribed.

CGHâ??s list of exercises includes foam roller, lying and standing IT band stretches, plus single-leg mini squats, Bulgarian squats, double and single-leg bridges, step-ups, half squats, wall squats, chair stands and clams. Neither page gives a recovery time.

If you are running this weekend

If outer-knee pain is already there, CGHâ??s advice to reduce the duration and intensity of running applies, and the warning signs above (weakness, numbness or shooting pain down the leg) are a reason to get medical attention.

This is general information, not medical advice. See a doctor or physiotherapist about pain that persists or worsens.

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