

Tendon pain and bursal inflammation have a way of turning ordinary movement into a daily negotiation. Reaching for a mug, climbing stairs, rolling onto one shoulder at night, getting out of a car after a long drive, all of it can start to feel loaded. Many people wait too long before seeking help because the problem seems minor at first. They assume rest will handle it, or they push through because work, family demands, or training schedules leave little room for recovery. By the time they arrive at a pain clinic, the issue has often become more stubborn than the original injury ever looked on paper.

That pattern matters because tendonitis and bursitis do not always behave like short-lived irritations. Some cases settle with a few weeks of activity adjustment and a focused exercise plan. Others linger, partly because the tissue is being irritated over and over by the same movement pattern, poor mechanics, untreated weakness, or a return to full activity before the area can tolerate load again. Good treatment is not just about reducing pain. It is about understanding why the tissue is overloaded in the first place, then matching the therapy to the person, the body region, and the demands of their life.

A well-run pain clinic can be useful here because these conditions often sit in the gray zone between primary care, orthopedics, and physical therapy. They are not always surgical, but they are not always simple either. The best care is usually multimodal, practical, and paced.

What tendonitis and bursitis actually are

The terms get used interchangeably in casual conversation, but they are not the same.

Tendonitis refers to irritation or inflammation involving a tendon, the tough connective tissue that anchors muscle to bone. In real practice, many chronic tendon problems are more accurately described as tendinopathy rather than active tendonitis. That distinction matters because a tendon that has been painful for months may show degenerative change and poor load tolerance more than classic inflammation. If treatment is built around the wrong model, progress is often slow.

Bursitis involves a bursa, a small fluid-filled sac that reduces friction between structures such as bone, tendon, and skin. When a bursa becomes irritated, the area can swell, ache, and become very sensitive to pressure or

repetitive motion. Common examples include subacromial bursitis in the shoulder, trochanteric bursitis around the lateral hip, olecranon bursitis at the elbow, and prepatellar bursitis over the kneecap.

The two conditions can overlap. A painful shoulder may involve the rotator cuff tendons and the subacromial bursa. A sore lateral hip may involve gluteal tendinopathy with bursal irritation. That overlap is one reason treatment based on labels alone can miss the mark. The more useful question is usually this: which tissues are involved, what movements provoke them, and what is maintaining the cycle?

Why these problems become chronic

Acute overuse is the obvious culprit, but it is rarely the whole story. Repeated lifting, overhead work, distance running, racquet sports, kneeling, direct pressure, poor sleep, deconditioning after inactivity, age-related tissue change, and sudden training spikes can all contribute. I have seen weekend athletes flare a shoulder after one ambitious home improvement project, but I have also seen office workers develop stubborn hip pain from long hours of sitting plus weak hip stabilizers plus a hurried attempt to start jogging again.

Tendons dislike abrupt increases in demand. They usually tolerate gradual loading quite well, but they react poorly when intensity, volume, or frequency jump too fast. *Great site* Bursae are often aggravated by compression and friction. That is why the person who sleeps on one hip every night, kneels on hard surfaces for work, or spends hours with the shoulder repeatedly elevated can struggle even if the underlying imaging findings seem modest.

Pain sensitivity can become part of the picture too. If symptoms have lasted for months, the nervous system may amplify ordinary input. That does not mean the pain is imagined. It means the condition now has both tissue and pain-processing components, which changes how aggressive or passive treatment should be.

What a pain clinic looks for during evaluation

The strongest treatment plans start with a careful history and physical exam, not a reflexive injection. The details matter. When did the pain start, was there a specific trigger, what movements reproduce it, does it wake the patient at night, is there visible swelling, is there weakness, and what has already been tried? The answers often point the clinician toward the real driver.

A shoulder patient who cannot sleep on the affected side and gets sharp pain between 70 and 120 degrees of arm elevation raises different questions than a patient with diffuse neck and arm pain plus hand numbness. Lateral hip pain that worsens when lying on that side and with prolonged walking suggests a different mechanical problem than groin pain with twisting. Knee pain in someone who kneels for work does not always reflect joint damage. Sometimes the bursa itself is the main problem.

The physical exam then tests tissue tolerance, range of motion, strength, tenderness, and provocative movements. A clinician may also assess joint mobility above and below the painful site because local pain is often driven by regional mechanics. In the shoulder, scapular control and thoracic mobility matter. At the hip, core and pelvic stability matter. At the elbow, wrist mechanics can matter more than patients expect.

Imaging has a role, but usually a selective one. Ultrasound can be very useful for superficial bursae and many tendon problems, especially when guiding injections. MRI can help when symptoms are severe, when weakness suggests a significant tear, or when prior treatment has failed and the diagnosis remains uncertain. Plain X-rays may show calcification, arthritis, or other structural contributors. Still, imaging findings need context. Plenty of people have tendon degeneration on imaging without much pain, and plenty have significant pain with relatively subtle scans.

The first line of treatment is often less dramatic than people expect

Patients sometimes arrive hoping for one decisive procedure. Usually, the most durable gains come from combining symptom relief with smarter loading.

Relative rest is often the first step, but that does not mean complete inactivity. Total rest can stiffen joints, weaken muscle, and lower tissue tolerance further. The goal is to remove the specific aggravating input while keeping the person moving in ways the tissue can handle. For a shoulder, that may mean reducing repeated overhead work for a few weeks while maintaining lower-body training and pain-free range of motion. For trochanteric bursitis, it may mean avoiding side-lying on the painful hip, reducing hill work, and modifying gait or training volume.

Anti-inflammatory strategies can help in selected cases, especially when there is clear acute inflammatory pain or swelling. Ice may reduce symptoms in the short term. Nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory medications may be useful for some patients if their medical history allows it. They are not ideal for everyone, particularly those with kidney disease, stomach ulcers, certain cardiovascular risks, or interactions with other medications. A good pain clinic weighs those trade-offs rather than handing out the same advice to everyone.

Targeted exercise is the centerpiece in many tendon cases. That often surprises patients who fear movement because movement has been painful. The nuance is that the right dose and type of loading can improve tendon capacity over time, while random or excessive loading can keep it irritable. Isometric exercises can calm pain in some cases. Slow resistance work helps many chronic tendon problems. Eccentric loading has a place, but it is not magic and it is not always the only answer. Progression matters more than jargon.

Physical therapy is often the hinge point

A skilled physical therapist does more than hand out stretches. For tendonitis and bursitis, therapy usually works best when it addresses load management, strength deficits, movement quality, and return-to-activity planning.

For rotator cuff related shoulder pain, therapy may include scapular stabilization, rotator cuff strengthening, thoracic mobility work, and changes in lifting technique. For lateral hip pain, the focus often shifts toward gluteal strength, pelvic control, walking mechanics, and avoidance of compressive positions that squeeze the irritated tissues. For patellar or Achilles tendon pain, tendon loading is carefully staged around what the tendon can tolerate that week, not what an internet program says should happen by week three.

One of the biggest mistakes I see is the mismatch between symptoms and exercise intensity. People either do too little because they are afraid, or far too much because they are determined. Both can stall progress. A useful rule in clinic is that mild, temporary discomfort during rehab may be acceptable, but sharp escalating pain or next-day flare that lingers suggests the dose was too high. Tendons often respond to consistency more than heroics.

Injection therapies can help, but they are not all equal

This is where a pain clinic often becomes especially valuable, because image-guided procedures can improve accuracy and reduce guesswork. The key is choosing the right injection for the right tissue at the right time.

Corticosteroid injections can be very effective for bursitis, particularly when pain is limiting sleep, basic movement, or participation in therapy. Subacromial bursitis, trochanteric bursitis, and some knee or elbow bursae may respond well when the diagnosis is sound and the injection is well placed. Relief can come quickly, sometimes within days, though not always immediately.

Tendon injections are more complicated. Injecting steroid directly into certain tendons can weaken tissue and is generally approached with caution or avoided, depending on the tendon and situation. Around a tendon or into

an adjacent bursa may be reasonable in selected cases, but simply “getting a shot” without anatomical precision can create false expectations or expose tissue to unnecessary risk.

Platelet-rich plasma, often called PRP, is discussed frequently for chronic tendinopathy. The evidence is mixed and tends to vary by body region, chronicity, preparation method, and study design. Some patients improve, especially when PRP is paired with a disciplined rehab program. Others spend a significant amount out of pocket and notice little change. A responsible clinic frames PRP as a possible tool, not a guarantee. It may be more appealing in chronic tendon pain that has resisted standard care, less appealing when the primary issue is classic bursitis that may respond to simpler measures.

Hyaluronic acid is used more often inside joints than in tendon or bursal disorders, though some off-label uses exist. Ultrasound-guided aspiration may be appropriate for certain bursae if there is substantial fluid accumulation, but that decision depends on location, recurrence pattern, and whether infection is a concern. Septic bursitis is a different category altogether and requires prompt medical attention.

A practical way to think about procedures is this:

- Steroid tends to help inflammatory bursitis more predictably than chronic tendon degeneration.
- PRP may be considered for selected chronic tendinopathies, especially after rehab alone has stalled.
- Ultrasound guidance improves precision, which matters when treating small or deep structures.
- No injection replaces load management and progressive strengthening.
- Repeated injections without a broader plan usually lead to temporary relief, then recurrence.

Shockwave and other noninjection options

Extracorporeal shockwave therapy has gained a foothold for some chronic tendon problems, especially plantar fasciopathy, calcific shoulder tendinopathy, and certain cases of Achilles or patellar tendinopathy. Results vary, and the treatment can be uncomfortable, but for the right patient it can be a useful middle ground between exercise alone and more invasive intervention. It is less often the go-to option for straightforward bursitis.

Other modalities, such as therapeutic ultrasound, laser therapy, and electrical stimulation, are sometimes offered. Their value tends to be supportive rather than central. They may help symptom control in some patients, but they rarely overcome poor mechanics, deconditioning, or an overload pattern by themselves. Patients often do best when passive modalities are framed as adjuncts, not the main event.

Region-specific realities that shape treatment

The body region matters because different tissues respond differently to stress and to intervention.

Shoulder pain can be particularly frustrating because many daily tasks demand some degree of arm elevation. Subacromial bursitis and rotator cuff tendinopathy often coexist. If overhead work cannot be reduced, even excellent treatment may progress slowly. A painter, nurse, mechanic, or warehouse worker often needs a modified duty plan, not just home exercises.

Lateral hip pain has its own pattern. Many people are told they have “hip bursitis” when the deeper issue is gluteal tendinopathy with bursal irritation. They may stretch aggressively, cross their legs often, and sleep on the sore side, all of which increase compression around the irritated tissues. Once those habits change and hip abductor strength improves, symptoms often settle more reliably than they do with repeated injections alone.

Elbow bursitis, particularly at the tip of the elbow, sometimes follows direct pressure more than repetitive movement. Office habits, driving posture, and leaning on hard surfaces can matter as much as gym activity. If there is redness, warmth, or fever, infection has to be considered quickly.

Knee bursitis can be very mechanical. Tile setters, gardeners, and tradespeople who kneel for work may need protective padding and task modification as much as medication. When the bursa is repeatedly compressed, treatment that ignores the workplace almost always falls short.

When symptoms suggest something more serious

Most tendon and bursal problems are not emergencies, but a few red flags deserve prompt evaluation. A pain clinic or primary clinician should move quickly when symptoms point away from ordinary overuse.

- Sudden marked weakness after an injury, especially if lifting the limb becomes difficult
- Rapid swelling with redness, warmth, fever, or feeling unwell
- Significant night pain that is worsening despite rest
- Numbness, tingling, or pain radiating in a nerve-like pattern
- Pain after a fall or direct trauma that raises concern for fracture or tear

These are not reasons to panic, but they are reasons not to self-diagnose for weeks.

Why some patients improve fast and others do not

There is no single timeline. Acute bursitis may calm down within a few weeks when the trigger is removed and inflammation is addressed. Chronic tendinopathy can take months of measured progression. The gap between those timelines frustrates people, especially active patients who are used to solving problems with effort. Tendons do not usually reward impatience.

Several factors slow recovery. Smoking impairs tissue healing. Poor sleep amplifies pain sensitivity and reduces resilience. Diabetes can affect connective tissue quality. Statin use, though important for many patients, occasionally enters the conversation when muscle and tendon complaints are part of a broader pattern. Menopause, age-related tissue changes, and prior corticosteroid exposure may also shape tendon health. None of these factors make recovery impossible, but they influence expectations.

There is also a psychological component that clinicians ignore at their peril. Pain that lingers changes behavior. Patients guard movement, brace unconsciously, stop exercising, then lose confidence. A good therapist and a good pain clinic team help patients rebuild tolerance step by step, with enough explanation that the plan feels believable.

What a thoughtful treatment plan often includes

A realistic care plan is usually layered. Symptom relief comes first when pain is high enough to block sleep or participation. Then the focus shifts toward restoring capacity and preventing recurrence.

That plan may combine temporary activity modification, a short course of anti-inflammatory treatment when appropriate, image-guided injection for selected bursitis, region-specific physical therapy, and a graded return to work or sport. In resistant cases, it may also involve shockwave therapy or a discussion about PRP. In a minority of patients, especially when there is a significant tendon tear or failure of comprehensive conservative care,

surgical consultation becomes the next step. Even then, surgery is usually considered after the easier wins have been honestly attempted.

The clinics that get the best results tend to be the ones that explain trade-offs clearly. Steroid may offer faster pain relief but can be less helpful as a standalone long-term strategy. PRP may be appealing for chronic tendon pain, but cost and variable evidence matter. Exercise is slower than many patients want, but it often provides the most lasting improvement when done well.

The patient's role matters more than many people expect

The right clinic can diagnose accurately, guide injections precisely, and build a smart rehab plan. Still, the day-to-day decisions happen outside the exam room. That is where results are won or lost.

A patient with shoulder bursitis who keeps doing repeated overhead presses through sharp pain is not giving treatment room to work. A runner with Achilles tendon pain who alternates between complete rest and sudden hard workouts is sending mixed signals to the tendon. A patient with lateral hip pain who sleeps on the sore side every night with the upper leg collapsed inward may be mechanically reproducing the irritation for eight hours at a time.

These are not moral failures. They are usually simple habits that no one connected clearly enough to the pain. Once patients understand the pattern, adherence improves. They do not need fear-based instructions. They need specifics, what to reduce, what to continue, what level of discomfort is acceptable, and how progression should look over the next two to six weeks.

Choosing a pain clinic for tendonitis or bursitis

Not every pain clinic approaches musculoskeletal pain the same way. Some are procedure-heavy. Some are rehab-focused. The strongest programs usually integrate both, using procedures when they support function rather than replacing it.

It is reasonable to ask whether the clinic performs ultrasound-guided injections, whether they routinely coordinate with physical therapy, and how they decide between conservative care and intervention. Patients do best when the answer is not one-size-fits-all. A clinic that can explain why a shoulder bursa may respond well to one strategy while chronic gluteal tendinopathy calls for another is usually thinking at the right level.

The aim is not just to quiet the current flare. It is to leave the tendon or bursa less likely to become the same problem again in three months. That requires more than symptom suppression. It requires judgment, anatomy, timing, and patient buy-in.

Pain from tendonitis and bursitis often feels deceptively small to everyone except the person living with it. Yet these conditions can disrupt sleep, work, exercise, and mood far beyond what the imaging report suggests. With a careful diagnosis and a disciplined treatment plan, most patients improve. The path is not always quick, and it is rarely passive, but it is usually clearer once the right clinic identifies what is truly driving the pain.

Denver Pain Management Clinic
455 Sherman St #450, Denver, CO 80203

(720) 405-2330

FAQ About pain clinic

Do I need a referral to go to the pain clinic in Denver?

Denver Pain Management Clinic accepts referrals. Contact the clinic and your insurance plan before booking to confirm whether a referral is required for your visit.

Do pain management clinics give pain meds?

Some pain clinics include medication management as part of an individualized plan. At Denver Pain Management Clinic, a clinician reviews your medical and treatment history and discusses options after an evaluation.

What medication is used for chronic pain?

Medication choices depend on the cause of the pain, your health history, and any medicines you already take. A clinician can discuss the benefits and risks of medication and whether other approaches, such as physical therapy, may be appropriate.