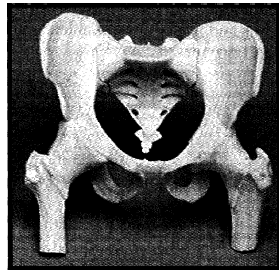


The Sacroiliac Joint

The Anatomy of the Sacroiliac Joint

The sacroiliac joint is one of the joints of the pelvis. There is a joint on both the right and left side of the low back. The sacrum

is found at the bottom of the spine and is triangular in shape with the point facing down. The



sacroiliac joint is an extremely stable joint not only due to its thick joint surfaces, but also due to the powerful ligaments that provide support.

Movement at the Sacroiliac Joint

The movement of the sacroiliac joint is unique. The sacrum can move on the pelvis. This occurs in positions where the pelvis is stabilized such as in sitting. The pelvis can also move on the sacrum. This occurs in positions when the pelvis is not fixed, as when walking.

An Injury to the Sacroiliac Joint

Once an injury occurs, there may only be inflammation at the joint along with resultant muscle spasm or muscle guarding. Sometimes, however, there may also be a shift in the joint itself, resulting in muscle pain and inflammation as well. There is usually increasing discomfort in the low back and buttock region, proportional to activity. There may be pain at rest in the form of dull aching in the low back after

prolonged sitting. Rapid, forceful movements may produce sharp one-sided pain in the area of the sacrum. This is sometimes followed by aching in the buttock and back of the thigh that usually does not reach the knee.

What Causes Sacroiliac Injuries?

Sacroiliac injuries may result from single or repeated incidents. Hormone-induced laxity of the sacroiliac ligaments during pregnancy may lead to excessive motion at the joint and result in pain. The impact of running is mostly dissipated throughout the lower extremity. However, it is possible the excessive side-to-side and up-and-down motions during the activity cause repeated stress on the sacroiliac joint.

A lack of hip extension or rotation may cause full motion to come from the spine in the low back, also placing stress on the joint.

An important muscle in the buttock region is the piriformis muscle. This muscle performs the action of turning the leg out from the hip. This is so important in the management of sacroiliac pain because the piriformis attaches to the sacrum. If there is tightness, inflexibility, or spasm, this may have a negative effect on the sacral alignment because it can pull on the sacrum.

Another contributing factor is uneven terrain as this may lead to slipping, stumbling, or falling, which

may result in direct trauma to the sacroiliac joint.

What Can You Do?

Immediately after the injury to the sacroiliac joint, apply ice to the inflamed region. After a few days, you can use heat and/or ice in attempt to decrease the inflammation and help control your pain.

Activities and positions that place stress on the sacroiliac joint should be avoided. These include sitting with your legs crossed at the knee, using a Stairmaster or Nordic Track to exercise, ascending stairs two or more at a time, or prolonged sitting or standing on the painful side. Also, you should try to maintain good posture as tolerated. During the day, a small roll may be used

in the small of the low back to help maintain the curve in the lower back that should be present. At night, a pillow should be used to support the legs to keep you spine in good alignment.

If the pain persists, it may be time for a visit to the physician and perhaps to physical therapy. Physical therapy can offer varying modalities such as ultrasound, electrical stimulation, etc. to control pain and decrease inflammation. Muscle energy techniques, strain/counterstrain techniques, and joint mobilizations may be used to restore proper alignment of the pelvic ring. Stretching regimens, exercise programs, and abdominal stabilization programs all try to hasten the healing process.

For any further information on the treatment of sacroiliac joint injuries, please contact the Physical Therapy office.