

Sacroiliac Joint Pain

The sacroiliac joint (SIJ) is located in the lower part of the back where the pelvis and the spine meet. This is at the top of the buttock. Sacroiliac joint pain is a discomfort within this area. Pain is often a symptoms that might stem from any number of other diseases or conditions.

It is unsure whether the pain begins in the joint or its surrounding ligaments. The ligaments are the tissue bands that join one bone to another bone. It can be difficult to determine if the pain is stemming from the sacroiliac joint or one of the other small joints within this area.

Sacroiliac Joint Pain Anatomy

The sacrum is a triangular shaped bone at the base of the spine. The sacrum meets (joins) the side of the pelvis. This is known as the ilium. So the articulation is known as the sacro-iliac joint. It sits at the top of the buttock, just below the lower back.

Sitting next to the SIJ are the buttock muscles – gluteus maximus, gluteus medius, gluteus minimus, and piriformis. There are also SI ligaments that support the joint.

Causes of SIJ pain:

1. **Hypermobility** – following childbirth, or in women with hypermobility syndromes, the SI can become hypermobile (too mobile) or even unstable. This means the joint moves too much, and the ligaments are not supporting the joint. This creates sheering at the joint and can cause inflammation along the joint line.
2. **Stiffness / Locking** – the SI joint can become locked or stiff. In extreme cases, it can even fuse. A stiff joint is usually easy to treat with manual therapy treatments. Stiffness can occur in people who lack range of movement, people who do not exercise much, or even in cases of hypermobility where the joint can get stuck at its end of range.
3. **Osteoarthritis** – degenerative wear and tear to the joint can cause osteophytes or joint inflammation.
4. **SIJ Syndrome** – this is simply another name for SIJ pain, and covers an umbrella of painful problems around the SIJ.
5. **Referred Pain** - Referred pain from the lower back can radiate into the SIJ.
6. **Buttock Muscle Tightness** in the gluteal and piriformis muscles.
7. **Strain or Inflammation** on the SIJ ligaments.
8. **Rheumatoid Conditions** causing inflammation of the SIJ.

How to Treat Sacroiliac Joint Pain:

1. Anti-Inflammatory Medication

An anti-inflammatory medication can help to relieve pain and swelling in the inflamed joint. Only use for a limited time.

2. Physical Therapy

Physical therapy often includes a series of exercises to help stretch and strengthen the muscles in the lower back.

3. Ice

Apply ice to the affected area for 5-10 minutes at a time three to five times per day. Make sure to wrap the ice in a thin cloth to prevent an ice burn from occurring.

4. Steroid Injection

A cortico-steroid injection can be used to reduce inflammation and can be very beneficial for chronically inflamed SIJs.

5. SI Belt

A sacro-iliac joint belt can be worn to stabilize the SIJ.

6. Deep Heat

Beyond using ice on the injured area, you can also use a deep heat. Alternate between the two to get the relief you need and alleviate the discomfort felt.

Tips:

- Whenever sitting, standing or walking, try to maintain proper posture.
- Exercise on a regular basis to help strengthen the muscles in the lower back.
- If you need to bend down to pick something up, make sure to lift with the legs and not the back.
- Avoid lifting anything that is too heavy, especially if you don't have help to pick the item up.
- Don't twist the body in an awkward position as it could cause the muscles to be pulled from their original position.
- If all else fails and you are still experiencing pain, consider acupuncture directly to the SI joint. It can help stubborn/chronic SIJ pains.