

# Informational Guide to Sacroiliac Dysfunction

## *Introduction*

A painful sacroiliac (SI) joint is one of the more common causes of low back pain. At the lower end of the spine lies the triangular shaped bone called the sacrum. The sacroiliac joint sits between the sacrum and the iliac bone. You can see these joints from the outside as two small dimples on each side of the lower back at the belt line.

The SI joint is one of the larger joints in the body. Very little motion occurs in the SI joint. The motion that does occur is a combination of sliding, tilting and rotation.

The primary function of this joint is shock absorption by providing just enough motion and flexibility to lessen the stress on the pelvis and spine.

Several strong ligaments and muscles stabilize the SI joint. Pain may arise from a sprain of the ligaments, a strain of the muscles, inflammation within the joint, or inappropriate positioning of the sacrum.

## *Symptoms*

SI joint problems have numerous symptoms including:

- Low back, buttock, and/or thigh pain
- Tenderness in the buttock
- Difficulty sitting
- Difficulty with walking or running

In most cases, there is a confusing pattern of back and pelvic pain that mimic each other, making diagnosis of SI joint problems very difficult.

## *Diagnosis*

This syndrome is generally diagnosed by taking a history of the symptoms and onset, as well as a thorough physical examination. X-rays may be recommended to determine if there are abnormalities of the joint that can be seen on X-rays. Occasionally, the injection of a numbing agent into the SI joint may be used for a definitive diagnoses.

## *Cause*

Typically pain will arise as a result of too little or too much SI joint motion. Too much motion can be a result of an injury such as a fall or car accident resulting in ligament sprains as well as muscular strains. Too little motion is often a result of arthritic degeneration or muscular tightness.

Women are at risk for developing SI joint problems due to childbirth. During pregnancy hormones are released that allow the connective tissues in the body to relax. This relaxation is necessary so that during delivery the pelvis can stretch enough to allow birth. This stretching results in changes to the SI joints, making them "hypermobile" - extra or overly mobile. The SI joints can cause discomfort both from the effects of the hormones that loosen the joints, and from the stress of carrying a growing baby in the pelvis.

### *Treatment*

If it is determined that your back pain may be a result of SI joint dysfunction, you will likely be presented with two different treatment options: mobilization or stabilization.

Mobilization is achieved through manual techniques provided by your physical therapist to realign the pelvis. You will be instructed in a home stretching program. Stabilization must come through adherence to a regular strengthening routine designed by your physical therapist to target the buttocks, abdominals, and low back. Some patients benefit from wearing a special brace called a *sacroiliac belt*. This belt wraps around the hips to hold the sacroiliac joint tightly together, which may ease your pain.

### *More Information...*

For more information please contact any of our three clinics in Roseville, Spring Lake Park, or Blaine where a knowledgeable therapist will be happy to assist you with your recovery needs.