

OPTIMAL HEALTH UNIVERSITY™

Presented by Dr. Joseph Baker

Prevent Hip Pain

The hip joint is located between the pelvis and the upper end of the femur (also known as the thigh bone). Although this ball-and-socket joint is extremely stable, anchored to the pelvis by tough ligaments, conditions can arise that generate mild to debilitating hip pain.

What Causes Hip Pain?

Dr. Baker starts by identifying the source of hip pain. This is accomplished by reviewing patients' medical histories and conducting complete physical examinations to determine if the discomfort is actually referred pain — meaning that its source is elsewhere in the body, such as the spine — or if it is, indeed, emanating from the hip joint itself.

From there, Dr. Baker develops a comprehensive care plan. A number of conditions can spark hip pain — following are several of the most common.

Vertebral Subluxations

When spinal bones (vertebrae) are misaligned, a common condition known as *vertebral subluxation* ensues. Vertebral subluxations in the low back often trigger hip discomfort.

Remember the old ditty that goes, “the hip bone’s connected to the leg bone, the leg bone’s connected to the ...”? Well, it’s more than a catchy tune; it’s also an accurate anatomy lesson. Everything *is* connected, and spinal misalignments in the low back can trigger hip pain.

It only takes one train car to skip the rail to derail an entire train. And it only takes one misaligned vertebra to launch a chain reaction, causing misalignment in the pelvis, hips and rest of the lower body.

Fortunately, Dr. Baker knows how to get patients' spines back on track! A series of gentle maneuvers known as *chiropractic adjustments* realigns the spine.

In one study, a patient undergoing chiropractic care experienced a “decrease in the pain and an improvement in the flexibility and strength that led to an improved [walking] pattern and decreased pain.” (*JMPT* 2004;27:479.)

Sacroiliac Joint Dysfunction

Located on each side of the sacrum (the triangular spinal bone below the lumbar vertebrae), the sacroiliac joints are susceptible to misalignment and strain. The result is pain in the lower back, buttocks and hip area. Chiropractic adjustments help realign the sacroiliac bones, mitigating dysfunction.

Short Leg

Many individuals have one leg that is slightly shorter than the other. The leg may actually be physically shorter (known as an anatomical short leg). But more often, the legs are physically the same length, but one functions shorter than the other by being slightly lifted by a tilted pelvis. This disparity leads to a disproportionate amount of force being applied to one hip during walking and other activities.

Strains and Sprains

Strains to the muscles surrounding the

hip joint and sprains to the ligaments of the joint are other frequent culprits of hip discomfort. In addition, sprains and strains to the lower back, knees or ankles can also result in misalignment of the hip bones.

Osteoarthritis (OA)

Osteoarthritis-related hip pain can be constant or ebb and flow with activity levels and the weather. It can be the result of a previous trauma, or a gradual onset brought on by repetitive activity. Patients who are overweight often have more difficulty than their leaner counterparts. OA leads to a destruction in the protective joint fluid, degenerative changes in the bones comprising the joint, and pain.

Osteoporosis

Osteoporosis, characterized by a loss of bone density, can also cause hip pain and significantly up the risk of hip fracture. Participating in weight-bearing activity is key to keeping this bone-robbing disease at bay. Regular chiropractic care helps maximize range of motion so patients can keep active.



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Also, preventing bone loss with calcium, magnesium and vitamin D supplements slows this degenerative process (*Ann Med* 2005;37:303-10).

Steroid Use

Repeated steroid use — either orally or via injection — for pain relief may degenerate joint cavities. Steroids also reduce calcium absorption through the gastrointestinal tract, thus contributing to osteoporosis. In addition, they may cause a temporary or permanent loss of blood supply to the bones comprising the joint (a disease known as avascular necrosis). When this takes place, the bones erode.

Doctors of chiropractic reject the use of drugs to mask symptoms. In addition to merely covering up symptoms, drugs can spark dangerous, painful and even sometimes deadly side effects.

For instance, one case study followed a 65-year-old woman suffering from hip pain who underwent injection of the steroid lidocaine. The results were disastrous. Instead of relief from her pain, the woman developed a disorder called septic arthritis.

According to the researchers from Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine, who cited her case in a journal article, “septic arthritis of the hip is a serious medical condition that can result in permanent joint dysfunction.” (*Clin Imaging* 2003;27:225-8.)

Fracture

A fracture of the head or neck of the femur can also cause considerable hip pain. If you or anyone in your family — particularly elderly relatives — suffers even a minor fall, schedule an appointment with your doctor of chiropractic immediately.

Other Conditions

There are numerous other conditions that may cause hip pain, such as congenital disorders and fibromyalgia. The doctor considers all possibilities when caring for patients with hip pain.

Additional Tips for Preventing Hip Pain

Besides the recommendations offered previously, following are additional items to consider:

Walk Right

Foot placement during walking, technically referred to as your “gait,” can spark hip pain. Feet with low or high arches may also disrupt gait. Doctors of chiropractic evaluate the gait of patients with hip pain and provide suggestions.

Be Shoe Savvy

Sub-optimal shoes may upset the alignment of the legs, in turn altering the dynamics of the hip joints. Choose shoes with adequate arch support and cushioning.

Stretch Pain Away

Certain sports activities, such as running and step aerobics, tend to strain hip flexor musculature. Toning the hamstrings muscles, as well as a comprehensive stretching program, may counteract this.

For instance, according to a study conducted by researchers from Thomas Jefferson University in Philadelphia, intensive hip stretching exercises reduced the risk of pain and missed ice time in eight competitive figure skaters with a history of hip flexor pain associated with repeated jumping. The results, presented at the 2003 meeting of the American Academy of Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation, underscore the link between exercise and pain prevention.

Avoid Sitting on Your Wallet

Many individuals, primarily men, carry their wallet in a back pocket. Over time, even this slight additional weight during walking can interrupt the balance of the hip joints. What's more, sitting on a wallet also triggers misalignment. The solution? Thin the wallet's contents and, whenever possible, place it on the seat next to you or in a shirt pocket or briefcase. Or switch to a money clip and carry it in a

front pocket. This will still cause a slight unbalance, but will eliminate the chances of sitting on it.

Be Choosy About Where You Sit

Prolonged sitting may contribute to back and hip pain and injury by encouraging stiffness in the lumbar region of the spine (*Spine J* 2005;5:145-54). You can help prevent low-back and hip pain by paying attention to how — and upon what — you sit. Furniture designers often compromise function for form. The result is visually pleasing but painfully uncomfortable furniture.

Most form-fitting seats are designed for the “average”-size bottom: leaving the majority of the world's population sitting pretty but painfully. To reduce hip pain, make sure your office and home seating is a perfect fit: not too big, not too small, but just right.

A seat-back inclination of 110 to 130 degrees — together with lumbar support — generates the least amount of pressure on spinal discs in the lower lumbar region. Arm rests and a seat-bottom that is five degrees lower in the back than it is in the front also help to reduce low-back pain (*JMPT* 1999;22:594-609).

Kids Get Hip Pain Too

If you think hip pain is just for aging baby boomers and their parents, think again! Even young people can experience hip pain. Researchers find that the pain is more likely to be caused by congenital hip dysplasia, athletic injuries and trauma — such as a car accident. Other possible causes at this age include rheumatoid arthritis, intravenous drug use, alcoholism or corticosteroid use (*Clin Orthop Relat Res* 2004;418:9-17).

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