

Sacroiliac (SI) Joint Dysfunction

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What Is SI Joint Dysfunction?

The sacroiliac (SI) joints are located where the base of your spine connects to your pelvis. These joints help transfer weight between your upper body and legs. SI joint dysfunction occurs when one or both of these joints do not move normally—either moving too little or too much—leading to pain and difficulty with movement.

Common Symptoms

- Pain on one side of the lower back, near the dimples of the low back
- Pain that may spread into the buttock or back of the thigh
- Pain that usually does **not go below the knee**
- Sharp, stabbing, or burning pain in more acute cases
- Dull, aching pain in chronic cases
- Pain that worsens with standing, walking, turning, or moving from sitting to standing

What Causes SI Joint Pain?

SI joint pain can occur when the joint becomes irritated or unstable due to:

- Injury or trauma
- Repetitive stress or overuse
- Pregnancy or postpartum changes
- Muscle imbalances or weakness
- Poor movement patterns or posture
- Arthritis or age-related changes

How Is It Diagnosed?

Diagnosis is based on your symptoms, medical history, and a physical examination. Your provider may use specific movement tests that stress the SI joint to help identify it as the source of pain. Imaging such as X-rays, CT scans, or MRI is usually not helpful for directly diagnosing SI joint dysfunction but may be used to rule out other conditions.

Types of SI Joint Problems

1. Restricted Movement (Stiff Joint) - The joint does not move well and may feel locked or stiff.

2. Excess Movement (Loose or Unstable Joint) - The joint moves too much, often due to weakness or poor stability.

Treatment

- Chiropractic adjustments or joint mobilization
- Soft tissue therapy and massage
- Stretching and mobility exercises
- Strengthening and core stabilization exercises
- Ice therapy
- Bracing or pelvic support belts
- Home exercise programs

Additional Treatment Options

- Anti-inflammatory medications
- Muscle relaxers (short-term use)
- SI joint injections for pain relief and diagnosis
- Rarely, surgical procedures for severe or persistent cases

Prognosis

Most people improve with conservative treatment. Recovery is often successful when combining hands-on care with strengthening and stabilization exercises. Long-term improvement depends on addressing underlying muscle imbalances and movement patterns.

Typical Duration of Care

A common treatment plan includes:

- About **10–12 visits over 4–6 weeks**
- Treatment frequency adjusted based on progress
- Transition to a home exercise program for long-term stability and prevention

When to Seek Medical Attention

Seek prompt medical care if you experience:

- Severe or worsening pain after an injury
- Numbness or weakness in the legs
- Loss of bowel or bladder control
- Pain that does not improve with treatment

Key Point - SI joint dysfunction is common and usually improves with a combination of movement-based treatment, strengthening, and manual therapy.