
HIP PAIN

The hip is made up of the hip bone (greater trochanter) and the surrounding structures, such as the muscles, tendons, and ligaments. Hip pain can be caused by an injury, a fracture, a tumor, or a disease that affects the hip joint, such as osteoarthritis, rheumatoid arthritis, or ankylosing spondylitis. Hip pain also may be caused by tendinitis (inflammation of a tendon around the joint capsule) or bursitis (inflammation of the thin, fluid-filled sac that protects the joint). Problems in the sacroiliac joints or low back can cause pain in the hip area.

A physician diagnoses hip pain by taking a medical history, performing a physical examination, and possibly by taking a radiograph (x-ray) of the joint. Your doctor may order blood tests to determine whether your hip pain is caused by any diseases that may cause similar symptoms. Computed tomography (CT), magnetic resonance imaging (MRI), or a bone scan may be performed if the doctor needs a clearer picture of the bones and surrounding structures.

Living With Your Diagnosis

Hip pain may cause difficulty dressing, standing, bending, walking, and going up or down steps. The pain may keep you awake at night. If it becomes severe, it may be necessary to use a cane to decrease the hip pain.

Treatment

Management of hip pain depends on the cause of the pain. If the pain is due to osteoarthritis, your doctor may prescribe acetaminophen or a nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drug (NSAID). If your hip pain is caused by bursitis or tendinitis, the doctor may prescribe an NSAID, recommend physical therapy, or do both. Physical therapy usually consists of application of deep heat or ultrasound or both. If bursitis is severe, your physician may inject a steroid-containing medication into the bursa. This medication is a powerful anti-inflammatory agent.

All medications can cause side effects. Acetaminophen may cause kidney or liver problems. The NSAIDs may cause stomach upset, diarrhea, constipation, ulcers, headache, dizziness, difficulty hearing, or a rash. There are few side effects of cortisone injection because most of the medicine stays in the hip area, although bleeding or bruising may occur after the injection.

The DOs

- Take your medications as prescribed.
- Call your doctor if you are experiencing side effects from medications.
- Ask your doctor which over-the-counter pain medications you may take with your prescription medications.
- Perform prescribed hip exercises daily.

The DON'Ts

- Do not wait for a possible medication side effect to go away on its own.
- Do not continue an exercise program that causes pain. Pain that continues after exercise usually means the exercise has to be modified for you.
- Do not cross your legs—this can aggravate your hip pain.

When to Call Your Doctor

- If you experience side effects that you believe may be due to your medications.
- If medication and other treatments are not helping the pain.
- If you believe you need a referral to a physical therapist for exercise.

For More Information

Contact the Arthritis Foundation in your area. If you do not know the location of the Arthritis Foundation, call the national office at 1-800-283-7800 or access information on the Internet at www.arthritis.org.