

Sacroiliac (SI) Joint Dysfunction & Piriformis Syndrome

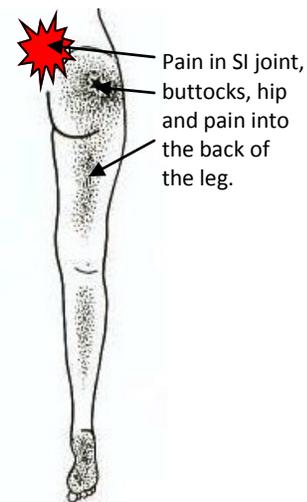
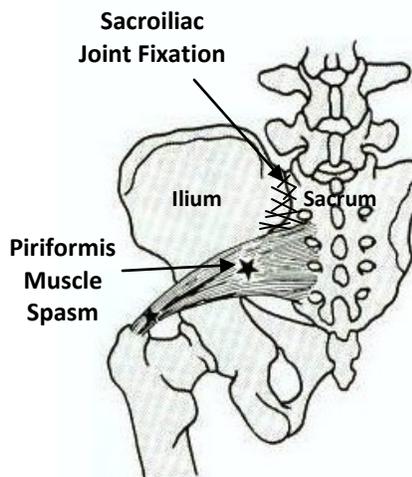
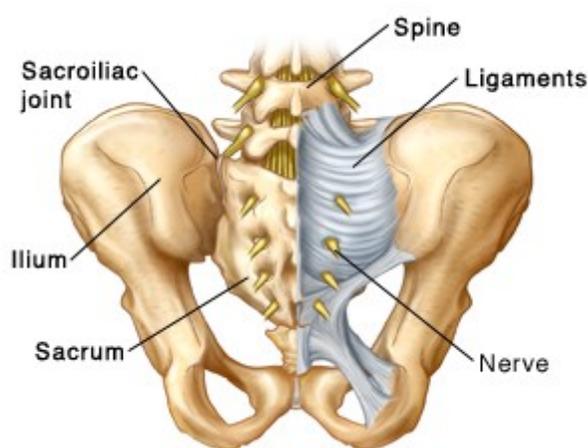
by James G. Halvorson, DC, DACAN

Signs and Symptoms:

- Dr. Kirkaldy-Willis, orthopedic surgeon, medical school professor, researcher and author of "Managing Low Back Pain," divided the degenerative arthritic process of the spine into 3 phases: **Dysfunction, Unstable, and Stabilization**.
- In the **Dysfunction Phase**, the stresses and strains on the spine cause muscles to tighten. Over time, the **breaking point** is reached. Tears in the muscles and ligaments around the joint cause swelling, pain, and more spasm.
- Scar tissue is deposited as the body heals. **Spasm, swelling and scar tissue (the 3 S's)** causes **mechanical dysfunction and fixation** within the joint and surrounding tissues. **90% OF ALL SPINAL PAIN COMES FROM THIS DYSFUNCTION/DEGENERATION PROCESS.**
- Sacroiliac (SI) Joint Dysfunction/Fixation is the most common condition I treat. It is very common in pregnant women.
- The pain is usually located in the low back on one side (in the area of the dimple) and may radiate into the buttocks, hip, and posterior thigh. The right side is more commonly affected than the left.
- It is hard to diagnose SI/Piriformis Syndrome medically. The fixation (due to spasm, swelling and scar tissue) does not show up on imaging (x-rays or MRIs) nor does it elicit positive results with classic orthopedic/neurological testing. **The fixation is not seen, rather, it is felt.** Palpaters of the spine (chiropractors, osteopaths, physical therapists, massage therapists) have been taught to feel the muscles and joints of the spine. **Areas of dysfunction feel tight and grisly in the muscle and also, restricted or stuck in the joint.**
- If the SI joint fixation is not treated properly, the sciatic nerve may become involved. Irritation of the sciatic nerve causes radiation of pain into the leg ("**sciatica**"). A herniated disc in the low back can also cause sciatica so it is important to have a doctor do testing to differentiate the diagnosis.

Treatment:

- The **most effective treatment** for an acute exacerbation of Sacroiliac/Piriformis Syndrome is **gentle manipulation of the SI joint, ice and anti-inflammatories to relieve the swelling, and exercises that stretch the Piriformis muscle.** After the acute phase, deep tissue massage and myofascial release into the gluteal and Piriformis muscles can be extremely beneficial.
- The nature of this beast (SI/Piriformis problems) is for it to come back over and over again. **The recurrent nature is probably due to the inherent weakness of the scar tissue and the failure of people to fully comply with their preventive measures.**
- Daily stretching of the low back, hip, butt muscles and pressure point therapy (using tennis balls or foam rollers) throughout the day can keep the muscles loose and pain free.
- Because of the likelihood of this syndrome to recur, treatment has to include a lifetime of **strengthening and stabilization of the low back and pelvic core musculature.** Also, **once a month manipulation** from your chiropractor will keep the joints and muscles free and clear of scar tissue.

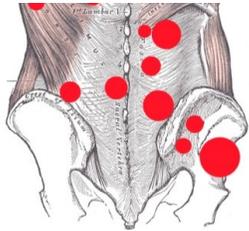


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SI & Piriformis Syndrome (continued)

Pressure Point Therapy: Also known as acupressure or Trigger Point Therapy. Lie on or lean back against tennis balls, baseballs, softballs, or lacrosse balls (putting them into a long sock will help hold them together and allow you to reach all areas of the spine).

- Put your butt/hip up against the wall and roll around on the balls. You can wedge the ball into your hip/butt when you are in the car driving.
- You can do pressure point therapy for a few minutes at a time throughout the day. Try to work your “trouble spots.”
- **Vibrating massagers** (like the Jeanie Rub massager) are very good at loosening up tight tissues as well.



Common Trigger Points



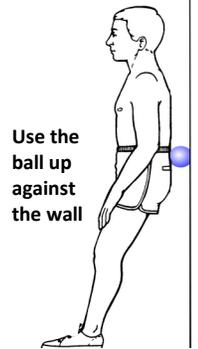
Tennis Ball



If you like more pressure, Use a softball or baseball



Styrofoam roller on Piriformis



Use the ball up against the wall

STRETCHING: DAILY—Hold the stretches for 10-15 seconds at a time. Always stretch out both sides.



Leg Across



Knee to Chest with Leg in Front



Seated with a twist



Leaning into the stretch



Seated in a chair

CORE STRENGTHENING and STABILIZATION EXERCISES: AT LEAST 3X/WEEK



Bridges



One-Legged Bridges



Bridges with a Gym Ball



Bird Dog



Planks



Side Planks



Side Planks using knees



Air Squats



Lunges



Side Lunges