
MISUNDERSTOOD BACK PAIN



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As a licensed and practicing Physical Therapist I had found it very embarrassing and shameful that I too experienced back pain that I had not yet solved. It took 7 long years to solve this chronic back pain problem and in the process I passed the knowledge on and helped countless numbers of patients that were seeing me for their own back pain suffering.

The aim of this article is to give you an in depth understanding of the true cause of your back pain. I intend to shed light on a topic that is scary, frustrating and confusing.

The pelvis and the spine are very intimately connected. Quite often, well meaning doctors and healthcare providers fail to address problems and imbalances in the pelvis.

Before you jump into exercises, stretches and medications, it is important to understand how the spine is affected by the positioning of the pelvis.

Patients with chronic back pain are a cut above the rest. After working with hundreds of individuals suffering with back pain I have learned a great deal about those patients. They are conscientious, “Type A” personalities that continue to try and hold up the weight of the world on their backside. They are constantly trying to support others in a variety of ways from financially to emotionally. They work hard and it seems that their body just had enough of all the pushing and stressing.

In addition to these traits, my patients have done their best to educate themselves on the reasons for their pain and possible solutions.

If you have found this page then I would bet you are one of them. Once your pain would not go away and your doctor diagnosed you with sciatica, degenerative disc disease, slipped disc, herniation or a host of other possible diagnoses, you were probably searching the internet within the hour for all the whats and wherefores.

#1 My personal journey with Chronic Back Pain

I have endured my own personal battle with chronic back pain.

I have been there, and it is what brought me here. Like all of my patients I had a lot of responsibilities in my life and I did not have time for back pain. Because of the pain, I only did what I had to and eliminated “unnecessary” things like visiting with friends, playing with my dogs, planting flowers, walking in the park and driving long distances and I even avoided trips requiring a plane if I could. Basically, I eliminated everything in life that may have brought me JOY.

Many times I avoided going out to a restaurant because I was not sure I could get back up out of my chair without an embarrassing scene and my friend having to lift me up. Life got *empty of joy* and just *full of basic responsibilities that just HAD to be done*. I felt like I really did not have much to give into my career and my job really became a chore because it was just hard and painful. I would rather be sitting or lying somewhere rather than helping others get out of their pain.

I slowly started putting the pieces together to solve the problem. I discovered the issue was my sacroiliac joint which I had learned about at a continuing education course. I learned about using bodywork, doing the right exercises and strengthening the core, using natural anti-inflammatories and natural muscle relaxers, the emotional component of chronic pain and a host of other things as well.

#2 Can you relate?

Many people repeatedly go back to their doctor for chronic back pain and sometimes they are looked down upon as being “drug seekers” or “addicts”. Having chronic pain is scary for many reasons.

- It undermines your trust in your body
- It is isolating because nobody really seems to understand
- It makes you feel “broken”
- It steals away most enjoyments out of life
- It is exhausting
- You fear that surgery is the only option
- You may feel reliant on pain medications but they make you feel foggy and further disconnected from life

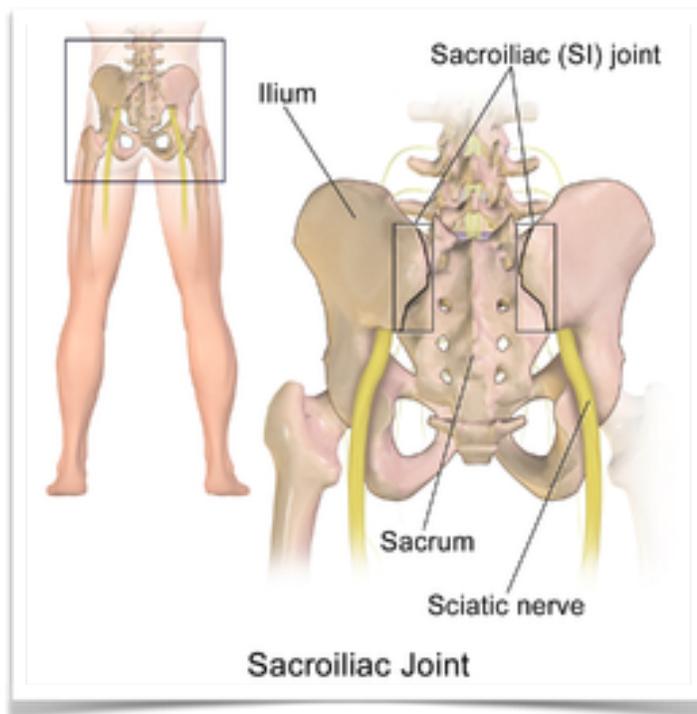
Maybe your MIRs came back normal and yet you have excruciating pain. What now? There is no real solution if there is not a surgical fix right? Wrong! There is a solution and it is in your pelvis.

#3 What is the sacroiliac joint?

The pelvis is the foundation of your spine. Your spine has many small segments all stacked on top of each other. This stack rests on top of the pelvis.

When the pelvis is not level, it is much like the foundation of a house. If the foundation of your house is not level, then it does not matter how many times you change out the doors and windows from the warping and breakage. If you do not fix the foundation of the house, the warping and breakage will continue to return until the underlying problem is addressed in the foundation.

The pelvis is comprised of 3 different bones one ilium on the left and another ilium on the right, which I call wing bones. In the center below the spine is the sacrum, which I call the triangle bone.



#4 Does your spine just feel crooked?

It is not surprise that your body feels crooked. One thing that happens when the sacroiliac joint is not working properly and is just plain cattywampus one wing bone tends to be higher than the other one. It is the wing bone that attaches to the leg bone (femur) and this can cause a leg length discrepancy. The side in which the leg bone is higher it will seem like that leg is shorter than the other. To you this feels like you are stepping into a hole every time you step on that leg.

The triangle bone in the center (sacrum) can also get twisted which will cause all the joints that stack on top of it to be off kilter. This can lead to a variety of symptoms and diagnoses including:

- degenerative disc disease
- disc herniation
- sciatica
- slipped disc
- nerve root impingement

- radiculopathy
- spinal stenosis
- piriformis syndrome

It is obvious how the discs can break down quicker causing degeneration and possibly a herniation. What is not generally understood is that the discs are able to heal themselves if the strain is taken off of the disc. If the foundation is leveled out then in time the discs can repair themselves. True, this is not an overnight process but it is possible. The body has a large capacity to heal itself.

It may also be obvious how a nerve root can get impinged from a cattywampus sacroiliac joint. This can also be referred to as radiculopathy with pain radiating down the leg. As you can also see in the picture the sciatic nerve exits the pelvis near the sacroiliac joint and as a consequence is easily affected by the movement in this joint.

Sciatica is also related to piriformis syndrome because the piriformis muscle attaches at the sacroiliac joint and the sciatic nerve pierces right through the piriformis muscle. A cattywampus sacroiliac joint causes the piriformis muscle to tighten up in a spasm which then pinches the sciatic nerve and then you feel pain radiating down the leg which is also called radiculopathy.

The pain may be unpredictable and difficult to figure out a cause and effect. Nerves are very fickle and tend to have unpredictable pain patterns that make no sense. This unpredictability leads to additional fears because you never know what to do or not to do to avoid the pain.

5 My MRI shows nothing... my pain is invisible

You are suffering from insane amounts of pain and low and behold you find out your MR is “normal”. It is like your pain should not exist... but it does! You know your pain is real because you suffer from it every single day. You are feeling far from “normal”.

The reality is that your pain IS real and it is causing REAL limitations in your life. MRI's typically do not show sacroiliac dysfunction and this can cause an “invisible pain”. There may not be any significant breakdown in the discs to indicate an issue on an MRI. However, there are innumerable muscular attachments to the pelvis.

When the sacroiliac joint is cattywampus in positioning or not synchronizing properly it affects all the muscles attaching to the pelvis and they do not contract properly which can lead to additional nerve impingements, muscular pain and inflammation that appear to have no cause.

Any occurrence of chronic pain is obviously a very emotional experience. Another lesser talked about contributor to chronic pain is the emotional experience itself. If you have constant tension and stress it can affect the tightness of the muscles in your body. Heavier emotional stressors such as

guilt, shame, anxiety, frustration, anger and jealousy are feelings that will build constant stress and tension and increase muscle contraction. These emotions can build in your body and create additional pain and discomfort.

There are a varied approaches to address the emotional side of pain and one of them is Emotional Freedom Technique or EFT. Use of EFT specifically for back pain is addressed in a very introductory and easy to understand manner within the course and book Free My Back. If you are interested in learning more about using EFT for back pain you can find the course at <http://designyourhealthacademy.thinkific.com/courses/freemyback>

#6 Why there is no such thing as “normal”

It is not unusual for patients with chronic back pain to come to me with “normal” MRI reports or following a surgery where the supposed problem was “fixed”. They continue to experience the same amount of pain and in some cases following surgery even more pain.

The well meaning doctor lets them know that the MRI shows everything is normal and figures that the pain medications are not necessary. Following a surgery the surgeon is quite confident that the cause of the pain was repaired and is stumped as to why the pain continues or worsens.

Doctors are supposed to have an intimate knowledge of the body’s physiology. However, addressing back pain at times with drastic surgery is troublesome without addressing a sacroiliac dysfunction.

- You end up on a specialist merry-go-round
- You never get to the root cause
- You are left to suffer from chronic pain that is only getting worse

Historically, treatment of pack pain focuses heavily on spinal alignment, disc dysfunctions and in some cases issues with the actual vertebrae without actually addressing what is causing the problems in the first place.

Recommendations may be made for spinal injections, spinal fusions, laminectomy and discectomy. All of these address the spine itself and does nothing for what is causing the spine to go out of “alignment” to begin with.

#7 Why confused doctors completely miss the importance of the sacroiliac joint in back pain

I have come to the point where I assume no one has a grasp of sacroiliac dysfunction and its myriad effects on the musculoskeletal system as a whole. I am occasionally and pleasantly surprised when someone does or even tries.

There is controversy about the mobility of the sacroiliac joint itself. has been taught in medical school that it is likely there is no movement that is present at the sacroiliac joint. The same is taught for the many joints in the skull. The problem with this information is that the conclusion was reached following dissection and inspection on cadavers. The reason this is a problem is because live tissues react completely differently from dead tissues.

Live tissue is elastic and flexible, and dead tissue is not. The entire sacroiliac joint is very heavily supported by ligaments which cinch it and hold it together. In a cadaver no amount of pulling will be able to pull the sacroiliac joint apart because those ligaments will have lost their flexibility. The reaction would be quite different if performed on a living pelvis; however, for obvious reasons that is not going to happen.

To this day there are doctors that adamantly believe absolutely no movement can occur at this joint and refuse to acknowledge any problem to be present at the pelvis. They may acknowledge that movement occurs during pregnancy and birthing of a child but then believe everything cinches back exactly as it is supposed to once the baby is born.

The truth is that the sacroiliac joint moves constantly with nearly every move you make with your lower body. I know because I can feel it and I can train others to feel it too. The entire triangle bone moves up evenly in relation to the wing bones (which go down) in response to all movements of the low back especially in bending forward and backward and in the hips flexing and extending.

#8 Healing sacroiliac dysfunction

If the sacroiliac joint is cattywampus then logic says to heal it then it needs to be leveled out. You may go to a chiropractor on a regular basis and he likely “adjusts” the sacroiliac joint when he “adjusts” the spine. This method of manipulation may be very helpful for some; however, for others the sacroiliac joint actually needs to be “re-educated” to move normally with spinal and hip movements.

If the sacroiliac joint is not moving properly then it is not able to do its job in getting your muscles to synchronize properly, which leads to a myriad of muscle imbalances. There are some muscles that will not contract at all, including a muscle in your abdomen that functions as a natural back brace. Some muscles will contract too much and be too tight such as the hamstring muscles in the backs of the thighs.

Re-educating the joint differs from a standard chiropractic adjustment because the “mobilization” is performed while the body is moving. Movements that are re-educated include forward and backward bending of the spine and hip flexion and extension.

When a static “adjustment” is made on the body it is not moving so the joint goes back into place; however, when movement is introduced the joint basically has a memory and “remembers” old positioning and goes back into a dysfunctional movement pattern. Pushing the joint into the proper

position during the movement helps to override this “memory” and creates a new one for the joint to follow.

#9 The next step

In over a decade of treating patients, and myself, for chronic back pain, I have found that there are a series of steps that need to be followed in order to truly resolve chronic back pain. The most obvious at this point is restoring balance at the sacroiliac joint by re-educating it to move the way it was designed to do.

However, before re-educating the sacroiliac joint it is exceptionally beneficial to decrease any muscle spasms and decrease muscle tension overall. Alleviating muscle tensions and spasms will allow for the body to get used to the new positioning and movement of the sacroiliac joint with more ease and comfort.

Muscle spasms and tension can be relieved with a variety of measures. Use of proper breathing techniques to address stress and decrease overall muscle tension. Magnesium can be used as a natural muscle relaxer and decreasing overall body inflammation. You can register for a free video series addressing all these points at <https://lisamariakeller.leadpages.co/freemyback/>

There is also a free free trial of the Free My Back Course that includes information on resolving muscle spasms. In the free trial, information addressing body inflammation is expanded upon. You can find information on the free trial by following this link:

<http://designyourhealthacademy.thinkific.com/courses/freemyback>

You will also learn what you need to do to move forward with the course if you want to learn how to re-educate the sacroiliac joint along with the other 5 steps of the system.

Remember, many well educated and well-intentioned healthcare providers, doctors and therapists included, focus on the spine as the primary cause of chronic back pain. Diagnoses are given such as herniated disc, degenerative disc disease, spinal stenosis, slipped disc, sciatica etc. I am sure you have heard one of more of these diagnoses thrown at you.

It is a mistake for medical providers to focus only on one part of this system breakdown. The primary goal must be to level out the foundation of the spine. Failure to do so wastes your precious resources of time, money and most importantly energy.

I have a personal interest in resolving chronic back pain. You can reach out to me at lisa@lisamariakeller.com to discuss additional treatment options.

