

Sacroiliac Joint Injections

A sacroiliac (SI) joint injection is used to treat pain in the lower back, buttocks and hips in patients with swollen SI joints. The SI joints connect your pelvis (hip bones) to the bottom of your spine. These joints move when you move. They also help provide support for your back and the lower part of your body. Sometimes, the joints become swollen from injury, arthritis or normal wear and tear. They can also swell if your legs are different lengths.

During the procedure, the SI joints are injected with 2 medications. The first is used to numb the joints. The second is a steroid that will help decrease the swelling, which should reduce your pain.

Does the procedure hurt?

Before the procedure begins, your doctor will inject you with a medication called a local anesthetic. This will numb the skin over the area that will be treated. You may feel some stinging from the needle or the anesthetic. You may also feel some pressure when your doctor injects the medications into your joints.

Preparing for the procedure

Once your procedure is scheduled, we will give you instructions on how to prepare. It is very important for your safety to tell us if you:

- Take a blood thinner (for example, warfarin/Coumadin, Lovenox or Plavix);
- Take anything that contains aspirin or an anti-inflammatory drug, such as ibuprofen (for example, Advil or Motrin) or naproxen (for example, Aleve);
- Have a condition that prevents your blood from clotting normally; or
- Have any allergies to latex, local anesthetics or contrast (X-ray dye).

Please plan to have someone drive you home after your procedure. If you do not, your procedure may need to be rescheduled.

What to expect

An SI joint injection generally involves these steps:

1. You will be taken to a patient waiting area. There we will check your ID band, measure your vital signs (such as your blood pressure and pulse) and ask you some basic questions about your health.
2. Then you will be taken to the procedure room where the doctor will ask for your consent to do the procedure.
3. You will lie on your stomach on a table. Then the area to be treated will be cleaned and covered with a special sheet. This will help keep the area free of germs.
4. Your doctor will numb the skin with a local anesthetic. This will help prevent discomfort during the procedure.
5. Then your doctor will inject the numbing medication and the steroid medication in the joint(s).

Throughout the procedure, your doctor will use a special X-ray machine to help view your joints. He or she may also inject a substance called contrast, which will highlight the joints on the X-rays. If you are allergic to contrast, your doctor will discuss your options with you before the procedure.

The entire procedure takes about 10 minutes.

You will be awake during the procedure and may ask questions at any time.

Possible side effects from the procedure

An SI joint injection is generally considered safe. The most common side effect is soreness where you were injected. The soreness will go away once the steroid starts to work. Also, your leg may feel numb (temporarily) from the local anesthetic. This may make it hard to walk for 3–4 hours.

After the procedure

- You may feel relief from your pain right away because of the numbing medication. But this medication will wear off 3–4 hours after your procedure, and your pain will probably return.
- You will have longer pain relief once the steroid medication starts to work. This could take up to 2 weeks after the procedure. You should keep taking your regular pain medication if needed after the procedure.
- The pain relief from an SI joint injection usually will last for several months, but this may differ from patient to patient. You may have 3–4 injections a year.
- SI joint injections work better in some people than in others. If you do not have any relief or if your pain gets worse, we will work with you to find the source of your pain and explore other treatment options.

If you have any questions, please call the Pain Center at 617-754-5450 and ask to speak with a member of the clinical team.