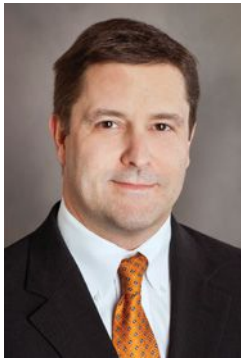


by Fred Newton, MD,
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Do you have a question related to this column or a general orthopedic question you would like to have answered in a future issue? Send an e-mail to AskPiedmont-Ortho@sosbonedocs.com

Q. I was cleaning today and leaned down to pick up something. Suddenly, I felt this hitch in my back and couldn't stand up straight. I've been in excruciating pain since then. What can I do for it? And does this mean I'm going to have continuing back problems? Will I have to give up jogging?

A. First, let me reassure you that what happened to you is a very common occurrence – and it usually does not lead to long-term problems with back pain.

Your first line of treatment is to apply ice, 20 minutes on and 20 minutes off, for the first 24 hours. After that, if you still feel achy, apply heat. During this time, I recommend “relative rest,” which means you should continue moving as much as you can. Going on bed rest will probably make the pain worse. Anti-inflammatory drugs, such as Ibuprofen or Aleve, will help if you can take them.

Although your pain may be severe, it probably is not an indication of a severe problem. The most common cause is a lumbar sprain or strain. Most people with this type of injury find their pain goes away in about a week, and they can resume normal activities and exercise, such as jogging. However, if the pain continues for 3 weeks or more, if the problem recurs, or if you have leg pain, fever, weakness or incontinence, you should see a specialist. That will ensure that you get the right diagnosis, which is critical for proper treatment.

Because this type of injury can recur, I stress prevention to my patients. Core-strengthening exercises are one of the best things you can do to prevent a recurrence.

Q. I have an aching pain in my buttock and hip area, but my doctor says there is nothing wrong with my hip. What should be my next step?

A. You need to see a specialist who can provide an accurate diagnosis. Often pain in the hip will stem from inflammation in the sacroiliac joint or in a nerve root in the spine. Many people believe that pain from nerve root irritation (often called a “pinched nerve”) always extends from the hip down into the leg, but that’s not correct. Often the pain stops in the buttock or the hip.

When patients come in with your type of problem, we listen carefully to your description of the pain, paying particular attention to when symptoms are worst. That information, combined with your age, medical history and examination results, helps us pinpoint the cause.

A problem like you describe often is caused by one of three conditions:

- **Sacroiliac joint inflammation**

Typical symptoms: Pain is worse when you are moving from one position to another, such as sitting down or standing up.

Age group: Usually seen in younger individuals; 16 times more common in women than men.

- **Nerve root irritation from a herniated disc**

Typical symptoms: Pain is worse after you sit for a while. Standing and walking make you feel better.

Age group: Occurs more often in younger individuals than in older adults.

- **Nerve root irritation from spinal stenosis**

Typical symptoms: Pain is worse when you stand and walk. Sitting makes it better.

Age group: Usually seen in adults in their 50s, 60s and beyond.

Once we make an accurate diagnosis, we can prescribe the proper medications and other treatments for that specific condition – and your hip pain should begin to improve.