

Sacroiliac Injury

It's a Real Pain in the Butt!

By Tracey Porpora

Simply by twisting your body in an awkward position or by lifting something incorrectly, you can injure your sacroiliac joint area, which can result in extreme pain not only experienced in the buttocks region, but also in the back, legs, groin and hamstrings.

"We've seen some situations where a patient's symptoms mimic emergency room cases," says Dr. Peter Ferraro, a chiropractor with a private practice, Sente and Ferraro Chiropractic and Physical Therapy, in Saddle Brook, NJ. **"Patients can have symptoms where they can barely walk, and it mimics the symptoms of a herniated disc injury, but ends up being a sacroiliac dysfunction."**

HOW IT HAPPENS

People can injure this area of their body in many ways. "A lot of people experience sacroiliac pain," says Dr. Joe Ferguson, a chiropractor and chairperson of the Department of Associated Clinical Sciences at Life Chiropractic College West, Haywood, CA. "It can be anything from trauma or a slip and fall, to bad posture."

Often, patients don't even recognize they have a sacroiliac injury because the pain has yet to present itself, or is radiating to other areas of the body. "I often say to patients, 'How

do you know when you have a cavity?' You have a cavity for a long time before you feel pain," contends Dr. Richard Alexander, a chiropractor with a private family practice, Alexander Chiropractic Offices, in Hazlet, NJ. "Our body doesn't like pain, so it does whatever it can to keep us 'pain free.'"

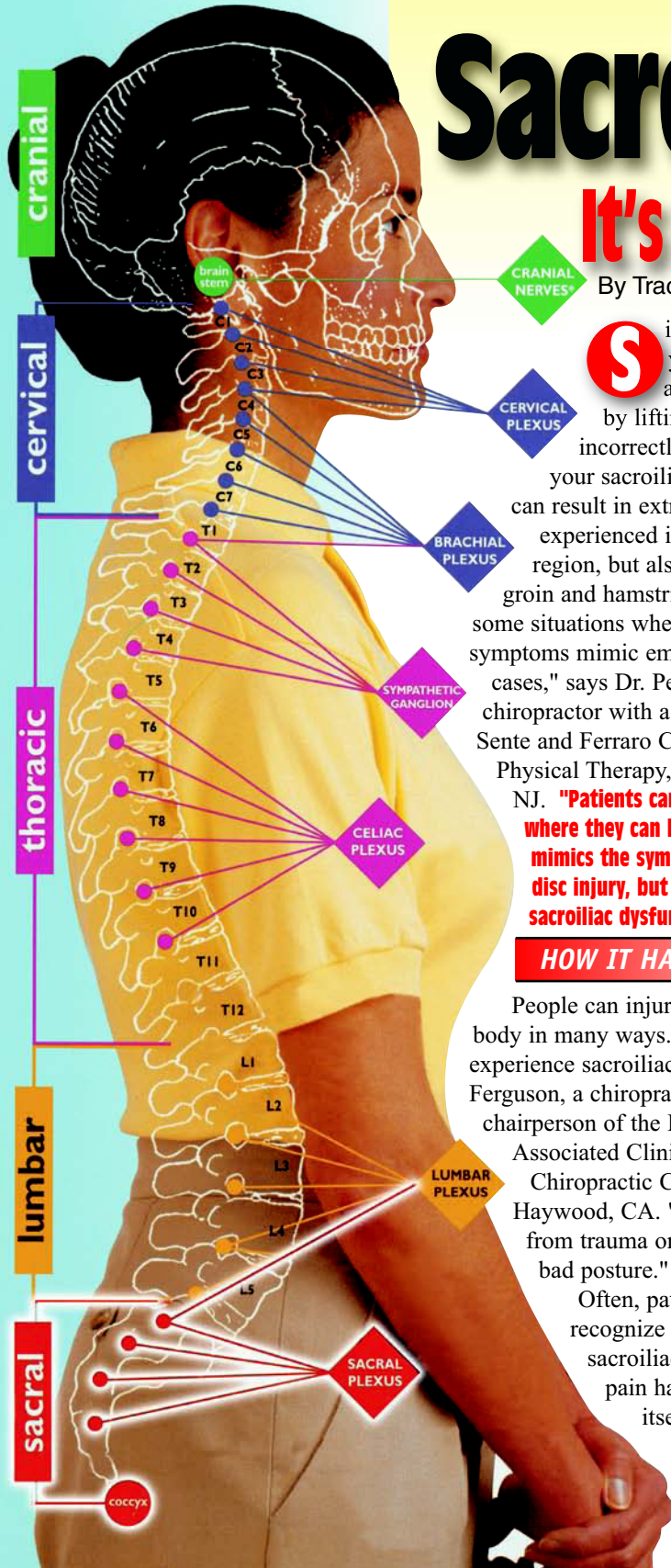
CHIROPRACTIC MANIPULATION

Effective chiropractic manipulation of the sacroiliac joint usually occurs with a patient lying down on his or her side. "I use the diversified technique where we do motion palpation," says Ferraro. "We check to see if the joint has its normal range of motion. If it doesn't, you need to realign that joint so it can function better. We usually do a side posture adjustment, which is performed by localizing the back area that needs to be manipulated. The patient is put in a side-lying position with his or her superior knee bent. We bring that knee up to act almost as a fulcrum, so when we adjust the sacroiliac joint, we can be very specific to just mobilize the joint, and not the rest of the spine."

To ensure these adjustments are most effective, Ferraro uses a table with a drop mechanism. "This allows us to put a force straight into the joint from a posterior to anterior force," he says. "By using the drop table, it allows us to be gravity-assisted." The length of chiropractic treatment often depends on the severity of the injury and its initial cause, says Ferraro.

WALKING WELL

In addition to adjusting the sacroiliac



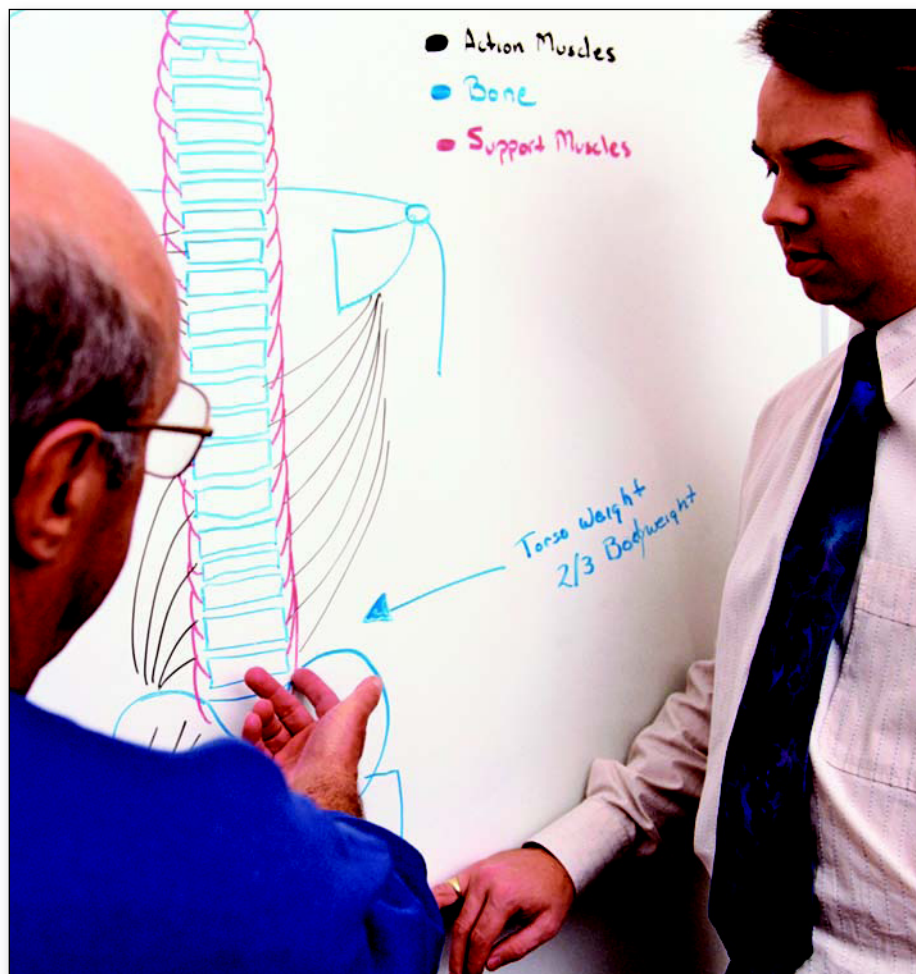
joint area, chiropractors say it's important to correct foot problems, which also can cause pain in the sacroiliac joint area. "People can have a foot fault, where one of the metatarsals (foot bones) is dropping, or they could have a foot pronation or supination problem," says Alexander, who is the past executive director of the New Jersey Chiropractic Society and the Association for New Jersey Chiropractors. "You can adjust the sacroiliac, but if a patient has a pronating problem it's just going to work its way back into the leg and sacroiliac area. We use orthotics for pelvic stabilization, which helps sacroiliac problems. If you have a foot fault and you don't correct it, you'll always have a sacroiliac problem."

THE HEAT IS ON

Chiropractors stress the importance of icing and heating the inflamed area, especially at the onset of the injury. Most chiropractors will tell you to ice and then heat the injury until you can get to their office. "I generally use moist heat, as long as it's not a traumatic injury," says Alexander. "Moist heat will relax the muscle and bring blood into the area. The healing elements of the nutrients in the blood are exchanged for the toxins that can build up in a tight muscle. That takes about 20 minutes to occur, so I recommend 20 minutes of moist heat application, and then at least 40 minutes off." As for ice, Alexander recommends applying it to the injured area for 20 minutes, then removing it for at least 20 minutes before reapplying. "If it's a trauma injury causing the pain, then you always start with ice," he says.

MAINTAINING A HEALTHY SPINE

Once pain is reduced through manipulation, chiropractors often prescribe an exercise regime to prevent the injury from reoccurring in the future. "We want to make sure the joint stays in its aligned position," says Ferraro. "We



offer home exercises that will help strengthen the surrounding muscles and ligaments to make sure the problem doesn't reoccur as patients perform their normal activities."

In addition, Ferguson often recommends "passive stretching" of the muscles that are "overactive" and "compensating for the injury," to help prevent future injury. "We can look at those muscles that are used a lot and overactive, like the hip flexors, and we recommend passive stretching, which is any kind of stretching where an external force is doing the work," says Ferguson. "Passive stretching for the hip flexors can be a lunge-style stretch, where the patient has his or her front knee in a lunge. Their rear knee is either on the floor or a gym ball, and they are letting

gravity do the stretching for them instead of activating other muscles." He noted that passive stretching for the lower back includes a seated forward bend.

There also are many simple exercises that can be accomplished with the use of a gym ball that provide pelvic stability to protect the sacroiliac joint area. These exercises are in conjunction with regular chiropractic care. "Just sitting on a gym ball is one exercise," says Alexander. "You also can lay on your back to do some flexions, or lay on your stomach to do extensions. You can even lay on your side to do lateral flexions with it. These are very simple, low-key exercises that will work the core muscles." By having regular check-ups you can ensure a healthy back.