Sacroiliac Joint Injection: What to Expect

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Sacroiliac Joint Injection:
The sacroiliac joints are where your hip bone (pelvis) joins with the spine. The SI joint may cause pain in the lower back, buttocks, groin or a portion of the legs. A sacroiliac joint injection can help confirm diagnosis and also therapeutically treat the pain.

What is the medicine used in the injection? Are there any side effects?
The doctor places local anesthetic (numbing medicine) into your joint. The amount of immediate pain relief will tell the doctor if the SI joint is the source of your pain. Also, the doctor injects a corticosteroid into the joint to help reduce any inflammation that may exist and further reduce pain for several months. Like most medications, it can have some side effects. For instance, it can cause fluid retention and raise blood sugar levels in people with diabetes. If you are on a fluid restriction diet or if you have diabetes, talk with your physician or other medical professional about managing these side effects.

Are these the same steroids that athletes take?
No. The steroids used in SI joint injections are corticosteroids, which lessen swelling and irritation.

Will the SI joint injection help my pain?
It is impossible to say for sure if the injection will help you. The injection helps the doctor diagnose if the sacroiliac joint is the source of your pain. You may be scheduled for a telephone appointment with your doctor a few days after the procedure to discuss the results of the procedure and your plan of care.

Is there anything I need to do before my procedures?
If the procedure is being done to confirm diagnosis, you should not take your pain medication the day of the procedure. You have to be hurting prior to this procedure in order to properly diagnose. Your pain medication can be restarted 6 hours after the procedure. You will also get a list of medications you will need to stop prior to the procedure. You may take your other routine medications that day if they are not on the list. You may eat a light meal prior to the procedure. You will need a ride home after the procedure due to possible weakness/numbness in your legs.
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How is the procedure done?

The procedure is done with you lying on your abdomen. The physician will first numb the skin with local anesthetic. You may feel a stinging and burning sensation with this injection. After the skin is numb, the physician will administer the SI joint injection using x-ray guidance. The actual injection usually takes less than 10 minutes to give, but you should allow 1-2 hours for the entire clinic visit.

Is a SI joint injection safe?

Yes, this procedure is safe. However, there are risks, side effects and the possibility of complications (as with any procedure). Your doctor will discuss these with you prior to the injection.

When can I go back to my normal activities?

You may not drive for 6 hours after the procedure. You can resume your normal activities as tolerated by you immediately after leaving the clinic. It is actually important to keep your body moving.

What if the SI joint injections do not work for my pain?

Treating chronic pain generally consists of several methods used together, rather than just one. Research has shown that physical therapy, medications, exercise, relaxation, and changing negative thought patterns can help people better manage pain.

Who should not have a sacroiliac joint injection?

People who are currently taking blood thinning medications like Coumadin (Warfarin) should not have a Sacroiliac joint injection. If you are taking any blood thinning medication, you will need to stop taking them before the procedure. You should discuss this with your primary care physician or cardiologist in order to weigh the risks and benefits of stopping these medications.

People who have a fever or any signs of infection at the time of appointment should not receive an injection. A woman of childbearing age who knows that she is pregnant (or thinks she may be pregnant) should not have the injection. Please talk to your doctor if you have any concerns.

Additional resources

- If you are a member of Northern California, you can visit your physician home page at kp.org/mydoctor
- For more information about your medicines, visit our drug encyclopedia at kp.org/medications or consult with a Pharmacist
- Contact your Kaiser Permanente Health Education Center or Department for health Information, programs, and other resources.

This information is not intended to diagnose health problems or to take the place of medical advice or care you receive from your physician or other health care professional. If you have persistent health problems, or if you have additional questions, please consult with your doctor. If you have questions or need more information about your medication, please speak to your pharmacist. Kaiser Permanente does not endorse the medications or products mentioned. Any trade names listed are for easy identification only.

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