



HIP, HIP, PAIN!

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A true ball-and-socket joint, the hip is one of the most structurally durable joints yet also maintains a great deal of mobility. The ball (femoral head) of the thigh bone (strongest bone in body) fits into a socket (acetabulum) in the pelvis. A set of dense ligaments surround and help keep the ball and socket steady. The surfaces of the ball and socket are covered by smooth tough cartilage which cushion and lubricate the joint, a good thing considering the tremendous compressive and shear forces the hip manages with every pound of the ground. Since the solid bony structures of the hip are not likely to give-way, it's the surrounding soft-tissue structures that are more likely injured in the hip.

Fractures of the hip are not entirely uncommon. The occasional game day hip check, driving the knee

straight into an object that refuses to move, or (my favorite) forgetting there was one more step down are just a few events that can result in a hip fracture. The same goes for dislocations of the adult hips (more common in children, geriatric patients, or adults with predisposing congenital conditions of the hip). Forces great enough to dislocate a hip most often include a fracture of the thigh bone or socket rim. In the event these should occur, find out who your real friends are by getting a piggy-back ride into the ER.

The hip can develop stress fractures due to repetitive insults to the joint. Chronic compressive cruelty to the joint or overuse of muscles anchored to the hip can lead to the bones fatiguing. Sports, heavy lifting, running, trying to sport a new strut, or practicing your new dance moves in the mirror a little too much can all lead to stress fractures. This could also be a sign of underlying chronic medical conditions like improper vasculature or degenerative disorders.

More common injuries of the hip involve the pocket full of ligaments and muscles that span the joint. Tendonitis is an overuse injury that can plague any of the muscles that attach to the hip. The likelihood of tendonitis harassing the hip joint is easy to understand when realizing the number of muscles that attach here. Symptoms include pain and swelling in the area during and after activity. The same goes for bursitis. The bony protuberance felt in the thigh is an attachment point for several thigh muscles and therefore a prime area for these conditions to occur. In addition, there are four ligaments surrounding the joint that are commonly injured. Three resilient ligaments that cup the socket and secure the leg in place are often injured by traumatic or repetitive events that force the joint past the normal range-of-motion (i.e. leg hyperextension during a slide, accidental splits during your floor-routine, or circus tryouts). The only way to declare the severity of these hip injuries is via MRI. As long as the stability of the hip is not compromised,

these ailments can be treated conservatively. Natural treatment involves alleviating pain, decreasing swelling, and finally correcting biomechanics/gait.

Some patients present with a "snapping" or "popping" condition noted when flexing and extending the leg. The likely culprits are fibrous bands that are extensions of muscles that cross the hip joint. These bands get nipped by the bony protuberances of the thigh bone. These symptoms can also be caused by a tear of the cartilage within the joint and warrants a detail orthopedic consultation with proper imaging. While snapping syndromes can be treated conservatively as above, the severity of a cartilage tear will determine the proper course of treatment.

Arthritic changes to the joint become a greater concern with age and excessive use. History of trauma, bone deficiencies, vascular ailments, and/or remnants of childhood conditions can all predispose one to hip arthritis. Arthritic conditions can be easily diagnosed by simple x-rays but the resulting damage to surrounding soft-tissue deserves a closer look. Conservative treatment can help patients manage symptoms and slow the arthritic process but surgical correction is hard to avoid in advanced cases. The types of surgery range from simple joint resurfacing to partial/complete joint replacement and depend on the extent of arthritic damage.

A more detailed list of ailments, their causes, and treatment options are available at www.gcwellness.com.

Hip to be healthy,
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