

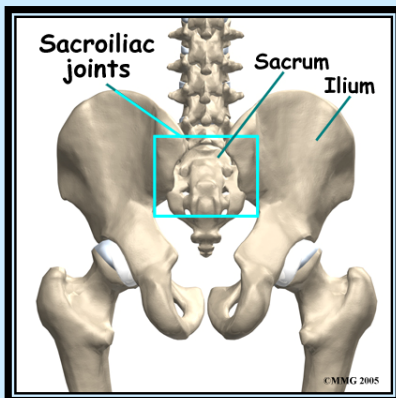
# THE SPINAL COLUMN

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By the Spine Care Institute of San Francisco

July / August 2009

## Location of the SI Joint



The sacroiliac (SI) joint is located at the base of the spine between the sacrum and the iliac bone. There are two SI joints: one on the left and one on the right.

## Sacroiliac Joint Dysfunction

Sacroiliac (SI) joint dysfunction is a common cause for low back, buttock and leg pain. It is often overlooked by physicians because the symptoms overlap with degenerative lumbar disc disease, herniated discs, lumbar facet joint arthritis and hip joint pain.

Most commonly, symptoms arise with varying degrees of trauma. Major trauma such as a fractured pelvis in an automobile accident is an obvious cause, but often minor trauma, including a fall on the buttock or side, jamming the right leg on the brake pedal ahead of a potential car accident, or even forcefully lifting and twisting “the wrong way,” is the cause. The SI joint may also become painful from various forms of arthritis including rheumatoid arthritis, ankylosing spondylitis, psoriatic arthritis, and infection.

SI joint dysfunction can sometimes be seen on an x-ray or MRI. The most accurate way of

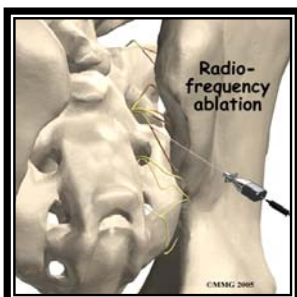
determining if the SI joint is causing pain is to perform a diagnostic injection of the joint. The doctor places a needle in the joint and an anesthetic is injected to numb the joint. If the pain goes away with the anesthetic, the doctor can be reasonably sure that your pain is coming from the SI joint.

SI dysfunction is recognized as a major cause of “failed lumbar spine surgery syndrome.” Often, the SI joints were injured at the same time as other parts of the lower back and not initially recognized. In fact, the SI joints may be the major source of pain. Because of this, it is very important to rule out the SI joints as the source of pain before having spine surgery.

*For an evaluation, call our office at (415) 353-6661.*



## Question from a Patient: What are the different treatment options for SI joint dysfunction?



First, you should try treating the symptoms with medications. If symptoms are seriously interfering with daily life and are not responsive to medication, we would try physical therapy or a SI belt.

Another option is a Radio Frequency Neurotomy. This is an outpatient procedure in which multiple nerves providing sensation to the joint are

temporarily killed by heating them with needles connected to a radio-frequency generator. The nerves do grow back and the procedure needs to be repeated when symptoms recur. This treatment can be effective for up to two years. If other treatments don't work, surgery may be considered.