



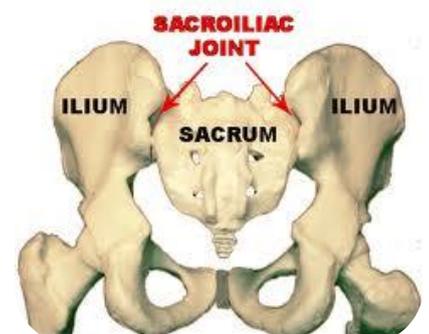
USING YOGA TO ALLEVIATE SYMPTOMS OF SI JOINT PAIN

If you ask a room full of beginner yoga students where their sacroiliac joints are, most will reply with a blank look that says, "I don't have a clue". This is a healthy response - if they don't know where it is, it probably doesn't hurt. If you ask a room full of more **advanced yoga** students - or teachers - the same question, many will immediately start rubbing a bony bump on their lower back, a couple of inches below the belt line and two or three inches to the side of the midline. That's a pathological response; they rub that spot because it aches.

I've been hearing a lot about SI joint pain recently and it has prompted me to write about this awkward joint that we have in our pelvis. During my training to become a yoga teacher, emphasis was always put on correct enlightenment in postures in order to protect our SI joint, otherwise we risk putting ourselves through a lot of pain and discomfort that could so easily be avoided through the correct teaching of yoga postures.

What is the SI Joint?

SI is an abbreviation for sacroiliac, the joint that connects your sacrum to your pelvis on each side of your spine. Your sacroiliac joint has limited mobility, stabilises your pelvis and spine, distributes the weight between your legs and torso, and acts as a shock absorber. Pain in the SI joint often occurs on one side, either from being too tight or too mobile.



Causes

Some possible causes of a painful sacroiliac joint include a pelvic misalignment, overly tight hips, excessive movement or a strain in the joint, poor posture, excessive sitting, or the stress of moving the sacrum and pelvis in two opposite directions. Sometimes, doing certain yoga poses, if not

taught correctly, can be the cause of sacroiliac pain due to stretches that strain ligaments and poses that prompt the pelvis and sacrum to move apart.

Symptoms

Generally, sacroiliac joint pain occurs only on one side. It may run alongside the hip or leg, unlike sciatica pain, which follows the sciatic nerve. SI joint pain is more common in women, due to wider hips, more flexible ligaments and hormones. Sometimes, the pain occurs on the opposite side of the joint that needs attention. This is why it helps to see a professional first.

Helpful Poses (see below for more detail)

Certain yoga poses, or asanas, can help strengthen your sacroiliac joints. The main thing to focus on is the stability of your pelvis and sacrum during asana practice. You do not want to overstretch this area. Begin by focusing on gaining stability and building up the muscles around the joint. A mild backbend pose, such as cobra, locust, bridge, bow pose or reclining hero pose can help you strengthen your lower back and hip muscles. When you stand in mountain pose, make sure your feet are hip-width apart, not touching. Also try twists and asymmetrical forward folds.



Caution: Always practice under the supervision of a qualified professional.

Poses to Avoid

Until the pain subsides, avoid seated forward bends, twists and wide-legged poses. As you begin to reintroduce these asanas in your practice, make sure to move your pelvis and sacrum as one unit at all times. Any separation may aggravate the pain.

Considerations

Before you begin a yoga practice for sacroiliac joint pain, see your GP to determine the cause of your discomfort. This will help determine exactly which yoga poses work best for you and which ones to avoid.

Take care of your sacroiliac joint, let it heal, help it heal and it will happily last you a lifetime.



EXERCISES FOR SACROILIAC JOINT AND SCIATICA PAIN

Warm Up

Hip Circles

Start on the back with warm up hip circles and pulling one knee into chest at a time



Hamstring stretch

Using a strap hooked over the foot to gently stretch out the hamstrings. Flex the foot in. No tugging leg toward the head (this will put unwanted pressure on your SI joint).

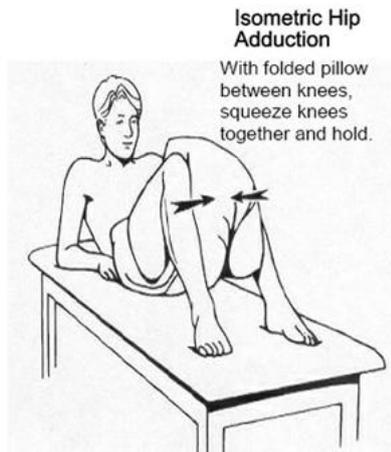
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Poses to re-align and balance

Isometric Hip Adduction

Can use fists together or a block on the inside of the knees as an alternative. Squeeze knees together and hold. Repeat.



Isometric hip Abduction

Pull knees apart with the resistance of a strap and hold. Repeat.



Threading the needle

Push your knee out to the side and draw the other knee towards chest. Relax neck. Hold and swap over.



Marjariasana - Cat Pose

Hold for the count of 10-30 and really suck in the abdomen as below, drawing the naval to the spine. Pull up on the pelvic floor on the exhale.

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Matsyendrasana – Seated Spinal twist

Important - draw the knee into the centre of the body before twist.



Gomukhasana – Cow Face Pose

Stack knees. Pull in core and fold forward leading with chest, Shoulders down away from the ears.



Agnistambhasana – Fire Log or Ankle to Knee pose

Stack ankle on top of knee and knee on top of ankle and forward bend. Make sure to keep the shins parallel to the front of the mat. (if too strong do the modification). Hold forward bend. This is a strong stretch – it will make you want to cry!! But stick with it and breath!



Modification:



Poses to strengthen

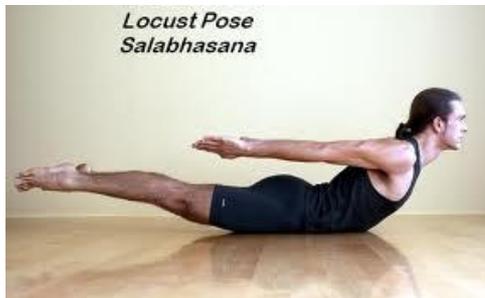
Bhujangasana - Low Cobra

Very important – toes pointing towards each other and heels relaxed to the side of the mat. If you don't then you'll be putting too much stress on the SI joint and will have the opposite effect. Stay low in cobra and take the hands off the mat to use and strengthen the back muscles. Repeat.



Salabhasana – Locust pose

Forehead to mat. Raise one leg at a time (keep both hips on the mat so you are just working your back and gluteus muscles). Then raise both legs. Then raise both legs and arms together. Hold and repeat.



Poses to finish

Spinal twist

Finish with a twist to ease tension out of the spine. Use the hand to really open into the twist and deepen into the posture. Shoulder relaxed into the mat. Palm facing upwards.



IMPORTANT

It is advisable to follow these exercises under the guidance of a qualified yoga teacher. *Please also make sure you consult your doctor before trying yoga, and get advice on*

- *any movements to avoid*
- *the most productive level of challenge*
- *safety modifications.*
- *effects of interaction between your medication and exercise*