

WHAT ARE SACROILIAC (SI) INJECTIONS?



The sacroiliac (SI) joints are located in the low back, where the pelvis meets the vertebral column. The SI joints may cause pain in the low back, buttocks, groin and legs. An injection into the SI joints can help diagnose the SI joints as the source of a patient's discomfort, and therapeutically treat the pain.

An SI injection contains a long-lasting steroid and local anesthetic such as lidocaine or bupivacaine. The steroid works to reduce inflammation, and the anesthetic numbs irritated nerve roots in the SI joints. These medications then spread throughout surrounding areas, reducing inflammation and irritation.

■ HOW DO SI INJECTIONS RELIEVE MY PAIN?

The physician injects a local anesthetic and steroids into the SI joints to lower pain and inflammation. The amount of pain relief experienced by the patient helps the doctor determine whether the SI joints are the source of the pain.

■ WHAT CAN I EXPECT DURING THIS PROCEDURE?

Typically, patients are asked to refrain from taking pain medication on the day of the procedure to aid in accurate diagnosis. Pain medication may be taken after the procedure.

After patient check-in, a nurse will take the patients full medical history and start an IV. While the patient is lying down, the physician will first numb the area to be injected. When the skin is numb, the physician will administer the SI joint injection using X-ray guidance. The entire procedure takes approximately 15 minutes. Afterward, the patient will be brought into a recovery area to rest for 30 to 60 minutes before being discharged. Patients will not be allowed to drive home; patients are required to arrange transportation before the procedure.

■ WHEN WILL I BEGIN TO FEEL PAIN RELIEF AND HOW LONG WILL IT LAST?

Patients with SI joint pain often experience immediate relief from SI injections. Relief typically lasts for months, however, the duration of pain relief varies from patient to patient.

More permanent pain-relieving options are available for eligible patients with chronic SI pain. Denervation procedures such as radiofrequency ablation (RFA) can produce enduring and profound relief in some of these patients. A randomized, placebo-controlled study showed that 47 percent of patients with SI joint pain who underwent RFA obtained significant improvements in pain, disability, physical function and quality of life.

Patients who do not respond to non-operative treatment may also be considered for SI joint stabilization, however, open surgery is typically reserved as a last-resort measure for serious and intractable cases as it is associated with more risks and potential complications than minimally invasive procedures.

■ WHAT IS THE ANTICIPATED RECOVERY FROM THE PROCEDURE?

Since SI injections are considered minimally invasive, recovery time is negligible. In most cases, pain relief is immediate and the patient can resume normal daily activities.