

Coccydinia

There is very little information available about pain in the coccyx area. It can be frustrating looking up coccydinia in back books and finding no reference or just a brief description of it as pain in the 'vestigial tail bone'!

What is the coccyx?



The coccyx is a small bony structure at the base of the spine. It is joined to a bony structure called the sacrum by a disc of fibrocartilage (see diagram). It is a remnant of the tail that we originally had and is made up of three small bones known as the 'union of three'. These pieces fuse together earlier in men than in women. During pregnancy and delivery the coccyx is freely movable on the sacrum, which helps ease the baby's way out.

Triggers

Pain in the coccyx area can be triggered by childbirth (five times as many women than men report pain in this area), a fall - down onto the buttocks or onto uneven ground; or a repetitive strain injury (caused by, for example cycling or rowing).

The coccyx can be fractured, displaced and /or badly bruised. Fractures and displacements can be returned to their normal position, sometimes by a rectal examination, and sometimes by manipulation (a technique used by physiotherapists, osteopaths and chiropractors). These therapists also use a variety of ultrasound and heat techniques to reduce pain levels.

For some, injections of local anaesthetic and steroids may be helpful in reducing pain levels. In a small number of cases, if a definite abnormality can be identified, removal of the coccyx can be successful (however, you may experience difficulty with sitting and opening your bowels for a few days after surgery).

So-called 'secondary coccydinia' is quite common. It is not due to an injury or abnormality of the coccyx, but is associated with lumbo-sacral backache (where the lumbar spine meets the sacrum). It can be relieved by treating the back condition, (using manipulation, exercise, painkillers etc.) as well as the coccyx. Removal of the coccyx is usually unnecessary.

About us

BackCare is a Charity Registered as National Back Pain Association, with three main aims: to fund research, educate people on looking after their backs and forming a local branch network. General self help booklets and details of the Organisation are available.

Please contact us again if you feel we can of any further help, either by letter or telephone at the address below.

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Last updated on 18.6.08