

Orthopaedic Connection

What Is Snapping Hip?

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Transforming patient information into patient understanding.

Snapping hip is a common problem, but I have never talked to a patient who really knows what it is.

It usually happens when you are walking or getting up from sitting. You feel and hear a snap or pop to the side of the hip. It is not felt in the front or the back of the hip. It is always to the side.

Cause of Snapping Hip

The snapping sensation comes from a band of fibrous tissue passing over the broad, flat upper portion of the thighbone or femur. When the hip is straight, the band is behind the upper femur (also known as the greater trochanter). As the hip bends the band moves forward. The band is always normally tight.

In some people it rubs or snaps as it passes back and forth. A bursa sac is in the area, which if inflamed can contribute to the problem.

Other Causes

What I mentioned above is by far the most common reason for snapping hip. But there are other causes.

- There is a narrow tendon that is in the front of the hip that can catch as it passes over the ball part of the hip.
- A tear in the cartilage or small bone chips inside the hip joint can be a source of pain and snapping. It can be disabling, painful and hard to diagnose.
- True hip arthritis would rarely produce symptoms of a snapping hip.

Diagnosis

Patients don't usually come to see me about it if they have no pain. When pain starts they call which is natural.

I need to determine the location and carefully examine the hip and entire leg. I often check the back as well. I need to know what activities cause it and if there has been any trauma.

X-rays are next, but are typically normal. If I suspect the cause is inside the hip joint I'll order an MRI. In the typical snapping hip I don't need an MRI.

Treatment

- If it is a true snapping hip and it is painless, I reassure and we wait.
- If it bothers you, I will ask you to modify activities and apply ice.
- Certain stretching exercises prescribed by a Physical Therapist can help.
- Aspirin or Advil (or similar) may decrease inflammation and discomfort.
- If you have developed bursitis in the area I may recommend a steroid injection to reduce inflammation.
- Modify sport or exercise activities to avoid repetitive movement if needed.

- In a very rare case that does not respond to conservative treatment I may recommend surgery.

Well, there you have Dr. Haverbush's short course (1 hour credit) on Snapping Hip. Have a good week.

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Good health, good life, all the best to you.

Dr. Haverbush