

Hippy Pain

By Paula Shingler, BSc, MCSP

Do not be confused - this is not an about a 1970's style injury but about irritating pain around the hip, Specifically pain around the anterior superior iliac spine (ASIS) - or the bit of the pelvis that sticks out above where the ball and socket hip joint stick out. This can be a very frustrating pain as you feel it with every step and often comes on without any obvious traumatic incident. Let's have a think about what it could be and how to get it to vanish!

The physiology of hips

There are a few things that could cause this sort of discomfort and it can be a bit tricky to work out what it is. This area of the pelvis has attachments of many muscles and ligaments and is interspersed with bursae (fats pads for cushioning). The main muscles are the rectus femoris - the major part of the thigh muscle which extends the knee, tensor fascia lata (TFL) - which goes down the outside of the leg to below the knee and abductors moves the leg out sideways, sartorius - a strap like muscle which goes across the thigh to below the knee and flexes the hip, abducts and rotates, and iliacus - an abdominal muscle which works with the psoas and transversus abdominus to provide core stability. The inguinal ligament also attaches here and runs to the front of the pelvis with the main abdominal muscles attached to it. From this you can see that this little area has significant influences down into the leg and up into the trunk.

The main culprit - tendonitis

In my experience this sort of pain is due to tendonitis where one or more of the tendon attachments onto the bone are irritated due to abnormal strain. The tendons attached to the ASIS will be influenced by the musculature round about the area so tight abdominal muscles, tight thigh muscles, tight buttock muscles as well as influence from recent injuries to hip or knee can all contribute. Any unexplained pain generally has a cause so try to think of a change that has happened e.g. increased training, new shoes, recent ankle or knee

sprain, long race, very rough terrain, excess lifting, or prolonged sitting. Running can exacerbate a problem but may not have been the root cause. Let's look at a little scenario. You had long race over tough terrain with many inclines and descents which meant that you had to use your abdominal muscles to their full capacity to maintain your stability. This overuse resulted in these abdominal muscles tightening and shortening afterwards. Tension on the attachments caused the pelvis to rotate. This caused tendonitis of the tendons of the rectus femoris, sartorius and TFL as they will be being pulled into an abnormal position. That is one example, but inflexibility in any of the muscles attached can cause tendonitis.

Preventing tendonitis

Prevention of this tendonitis can be achieved by

- maintaining flexibility
- improving core strength
- warming up and down after training and racing
- ensuring you have fully recovered from injury before resuming activity

There are other causes not related to tendonitis that must be considered if the pain does not subside.

Other causes to be considered

- Bursitis-inflammation of the fat pads that cushion the area
- Avulsion fracture- where the tendon has pulled a small fragment of bone off
- Stress fracture of the pelvis
- Referred back pain
- Hernia of the inguinal ligament
- Osteoarthritis of the hip

As with any pain that does not go it needs to be checked out but it is worth gently stretching out your abdominal and thigh muscles-(see exercises in previous article on 10 best stretches for orienteers. If this doesn't help you may not be stretching the right

muscles or you have a different underlying problem. Be cautious, and do seek a professional opinion please.

So to recap. Hippy pain is usually tendonitis due to abnormal strain on the attachment of a tendon or a group of tendons to the ASIS. Other causes, while less common, must still be kept in mind. After a tough few days in the bush we all have a few niggles- I myself have a large bruise after a tussle with a rock that got in my way at Easter. Once the post race niggles have settled if there is still pain then get it checked. It is way too early in the season to let a niggle become chronic. It would be a shame to miss out on those opportunities to bash through the bush- or rocks in my case!

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