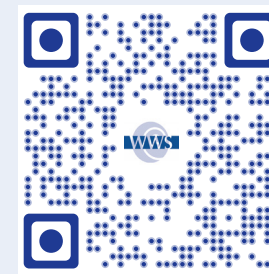




By Karli Lynch PT, DPT

Handling Hip Pain?

“... As you begin to increase your activity level and participate in more exercise, your hips must be strong and healthy to avoid pain and reduce risk of injury ...”



Now that summer and relaxation is coming to an end and the cooler weather is approaching, you may be thinking about going on long walks or hikes outside. Maybe you are motivated to return to running or an exercise class. As you begin to increase your activity level and participate in more exercise, your hips must be strong and healthy to avoid pain and reduce risk of injury, since many of these activities rely heavily on your legs.

The hip is a ball-and-socket joint. This makes your hips stable and allows for a wide range of motion that is supported by your muscles. However, a sudden increase in activity or overuse can sometimes lead to hip injuries like muscle strains, tendonitis, or bursitis. Osteoarthritis within the hip joint is also very common due to the load and stress placed on the joint from our everyday activities like standing, walking, and stair climbing. Physical therapy is a good line of defense to address these issues, as well as prevent them.

At your first physical therapy visit, an initial evaluation will be performed. The evaluation allows your physical therapist to assess your hip pain, joint range of motion, muscle strength, and soft tissue restrictions. There are two common locations of hip pain that patients most often complain of: pain deep in the groin and pain on the outside of the hip.

Pain in the groin area or deep within the hip joint with no known cause of injury may be due to osteoarthritis within the hip joint. Osteoarthritis often occurs over time as the joint gradually changes with age. Pain along the outside of

the hip, on the other hand, is more likely to be caused by inflammation of the soft tissues such as hip bursitis, tendonitis, or both.

All these conditions tend to be caused by putting too much load or repetitive stress on the hip joint, bursa, or tendon when you do not have the muscular strength to properly support the hip. A physical therapist will provide you with the proper strengthening and stability exercises to address your weaknesses without placing added stress on these structures.

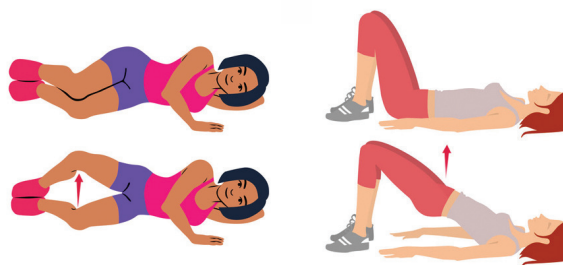
Another aspect of physical therapy consists of manual therapy, which helps reduce the current pain you may be experiencing. There are many different hands-on techniques that physical therapists use to open the space between the hip joint and reduce the muscle tension around the hip to minimize pain and maximize movement.

Hips provide the incredible power and force that the lower body needs to generate in order to stand, walk, and run. Strong and balanced hips are important to improve walking and running stride and prevent future injuries. Maintaining a strong and stable hip is also important to prevent pain in surrounding areas like the low back and knee.

Physical therapists are movement experts who are able to assess how you complete everyday tasks like walking, navigating stairs, or balancing and determine which muscle groups could be contributing to your hip pain. For example, see if you can balance on one foot. Are you having to lean your trunk towards the side you are standing on or does your pelvis look to be uneven? Not being able to balance on

one leg or balancing with an uneven pelvis or trunk lean may indicate hip abductor and gluteal muscle weakness which is what we see commonly in patients.

If you have difficulty balancing on one leg or want to complete exercises that would strengthen your gluteal musculature and help reduce risk of injury or developing osteoarthritis, here are a couple of exercises to complete at home.



The first is called the clamshell. Begin lying on your side with your knees bent and then rotate the top leg upward, keeping your feet together and

without rocking your hips backwards. Another exercise to strengthen your hips is called a bridge. For this exercise, begin lying on your back with your knees bent, then lift your buttocks off the floor or bed, pause for a second, then slowly lower back down. These exercises will help achieve maximum glute activation and strength.

These are only two examples of hip-strengthening

exercises, but attending physical therapy will allow you to learn other exercises that are most beneficial to reduce your pain. A physical therapist will also be able

to provide feedback to make sure each exercise is performed with proper form and alignment for maximum gains. Having a daily exercise program that is progressed appropriately and targets lower-extremity strength and flexibility is important to ensure the hip is strong and stable throughout its full range of motion.

If you are experiencing pain or stiffness in your hips and would like to improve your hip strength and stability before returning to your fall sports or activities, give us a call at WWS Physical Therapy. Our physical therapists will evaluate which muscles and structures could be contributing to your symptoms and help you get to the root cause of your pain. We then can prescribe an individualized treatment plan to address these impairments, reduce your pain and stiffness, and prepare you for safe return to your fall activities.



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