

Is Your Knee Pain Coming from Your Hip or Back? How to Tell

Pain in your hip can be referred from a problem with your back. It can be difficult to determine the true source. It is possible that you are having both knee and back pain or knee and hip pain at the same time, but it is not that common. We will try to provide some guidance.

Number one sign your knee pain may be coming from your hip or back - You cannot find any tender spots on the knee. Make sure you press on the joint line- which is right below the knee cap. If the knee pain is referred from somewhere else, there will not be any tender spots on the knee.



(Knee Joint Line)

Signs Your Knee Pain may be from Your Back:

1. Pain is felt in the low back, or from the low back into the buttock area. Pain spreads from low back all the way to foot or ankle.



2. Your pain worsens with sitting or bending?
3. Your pain improves with standing or walking?
4. Do you have pain in your low back on the same side as your knee pain?

5. Coughing or sneezing reproduces or increases your knee pain?
6. You have areas of numbness or tingling on the same side as your knee pain?
7. You have both knee and back pain on the side of pain at the same time.

Signs Your Knee Pain may be from Your Hip.

1. You have pain in the groin, or side of the hip on the same side as the knee pain. The pain may spread down the side of the thigh to the knee, or down the front of the thigh to the knee, but not beyond.



(Pain Areas)

Squatting tends to aggravate your hip not your knee.

Tests You Can Do:

1. Sit in a chair. Note your pain location and intensity. Now slump down. Is your pain worse? Unchanged? Now grab the seat of the chair with both hands and while slumping, pull up on it. Pain worse? Unchanged. (Pain will tend to change if the source is from your back)



(Slump Test)

2. Hip Internal Rotation: Sit on a higher chair or surface with your legs dangling. With your knees together rotate your ankles out to the side as far as your legs will allow. Compare the motion of each. Motion tends to be limited on an arthritic hip.



(Poor Hip Internal Rotation)



(Good Hip Internal Rotation)

3. Flex your hip in the seated or standing position. You may feel increased pain on the side of your hip if you have hip arthritis.

(Hip Flexion)



4. Lie on your back. Flex your affected hip (leg) until your thigh is vertical and the knee is at a right angle (see photo). Grab your knee with both hands and pull the leg directly down (like you are trying to drive your upper thigh into your pelvis (see photo). While pulling the leg down direct your hands to the opposite leg (you are adducting the hip, see photo). An arthritic hip may experience pain in the groin or outside hip.



5. In a standing position hold on to a counter and extend the affected hip directly back. An arthritic hip may feel pain.

