

Managing tailbone (coccyx) injuries or pain

Emergency Department

Information for Patients

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Where is the coccyx?

The coccyx is at the bottom of the spine. It is often called the tailbone.

What is a tailbone/ coccyx injury?

Coccyx injuries are often caused by a fall onto your bottom on a hard surface like a slippery floor or ice.

Other causes of coccyx pain include:

- Pregnancy and childbirth.
- Surgery.
- Repeated force or strain on the coccyx. For example, sitting for a long time while driving or cycling.
- Poor posture.
- Being underweight or overweight.
- Increased flexibility or decreased flexibility of the joint that attaches the coccyx to the bottom of the spine.

What symptoms might I get?

- You may get pain, discomfort, bruising and swelling in your lower back or top of your bottom.
- The pain can be dull and achy but sharp pains on movement are also quite normal.
- The pain is often worse when sitting, or changing position, from sitting to standing for example.

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- You may have pain during sex.
- A sensation like sitting on a hard object, like a marble.
- Discomfort when pooing or when the bowel is full.
- You may also find it difficult to sleep and carry out your normal daily activities.

What can I expect?

A coccyx injury can be painful and mean you have to change your daily activities for a while. Non-surgical treatment works in about 9 out of 10 cases. Or 90% of the time. Meaning most cases get better without medical treatment.

Healing time for an injured coccyx depends on the severity of the injury:

- If you have a fracture, healing can take 8 to 12 weeks.
- If your coccyx is bruised healing takes about 4 weeks.

Often, coccyx pain gets better within weeks to months. Sometimes, the pain can become long term (chronic) and your GP will need to help you manage your condition.

It is painful, is that normal?

This can be a painful injury. The coccyx does not move much but when you sit down your bottom pushes on it causing the coccyx to move upwards. This is why you get more pain on sitting and position changes.

You must take your pain relief regularly as advised by the clinician that saw you. You can visit www.yourhealth.leicestershospitals.nhs.uk/library and search for: 'Taking pain relief for an injury after discharge from the Emergency Department' or leaflet number 1238 for more advice.

What can I do to help my injury and pain?

- You can manage your constipation or soften your poo if it hurts to go. You can drink more fluid and increase your fibre intake. You can also use laxatives. Ask a pharmacist for advice.
- You can offload the weight when sitting down. You can buy a special cushion, like a wedge-shaped 'coccygeal cushion', to relieve the pressure when sitting. Or use a swimming rubber ring or circular 'doughnut' cushion.
- When you have offloaded your coccyx with a pillow you must slowly return to sitting without the cushion. This may cause your symptoms to flare up again.
- Adjust or reduce activities that cause you pain. For example avoid sitting for extended periods, limit heavy lifting.
- Wear loose clothing.
- Lie on your side in bed to reduce the pressure on your coccyx.



- Use an ice pack (or a bag of frozen peas) wrapped in a tea towel or over a single layer of clothing. Put this on the affected area for 10 to 15 minutes every few hours for the first 3 days.
- Try pelvic floor exercises.
- Keep as mobile as you can.
- Sit correctly to try and have a good posture with your lower back supported.
- Lean forward while sitting down, this can reduce the discomfort.

When should I seek medical help?

You should see your GP if:

- The pain does not start to improve within a 6 to 8 weeks.
- Simple over the counter pain relief or the pain relief prescribed is not helping.
- If you have bleeding from you bottom.
- If you have fevers or other pain such as in your abdomen or higher in your back.
- If the pain gets worse instead of better.
- If you get numbness, tingling, or weakness in your legs, or loss of bowel/bladder control.

Contact details:

Injuries Unit, Emergency Department, Leicester Royal Infirmary: **0116 258 5727**

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