Coccyx Pain Explained, Causes, Symptoms and Diagnosis



Coccyx pain, also called **coccydynia** or **tailbone pain**, is pain at the very bottom of the spine that usually gets worse when you sit, lean back or stand up from a chair. It most often follows a fall, childbirth or repeated pressure on the area, although in many people no clear cause is ever found. The reassuring part is that **coccydynia is rarely lifelong**, and most people improve without surgery.

This guide explains what coccyx pain is, what causes it, how to recognize the **symptoms** and how doctors **diagnose** it. You will also find the warning signs that mean you should see a doctor sooner rather than later. If you already know what you are dealing with and want to know how it is treated, read our guide to coccyx pain treatment.

What Is Coccyx Pain (Coccydynia)



Coccydynia is the medical term for pain in and around the **coccyx**, the small bone at the lowest end of your spine. The word comes from “coccyx” (tailbone) and “dynia” (pain). Doctors also use the name **coccygodynia** for the same condition, and the pain can be sharp, dull or aching, and tends to flare when sitting, rising from a seat or leaning backward.

The coccyx is made of **three to five small vertebrae** that may be fused together or remain slightly separate. It connects to the **sacrum** through a small joint with ligaments, and muscles of the **pelvic floor** attach to it. The bone is not completely rigid, so it can move a little, which is why it can be bruised, strained or pushed out of its normal position. Its name comes from the Greek word for “cuckoo,” because early anatomists thought its shape resembled a cuckoo’s beak.

Coccyx pain is not rare. It can affect teenagers and adults, and women are about five times more likely than men to develop it, partly because childbirth and pelvic anatomy put more stress on the area. When you lean back in a chair, your **sitting bones** normally carry most of your weight. If the coccyx takes on part of that load, pressure on an injured or sensitive tailbone can become painful quickly.

What Causes Coccyx Pain

Coccyx pain usually starts with one clear event or with pressure that builds up over time, but sometimes it appears with no obvious trigger. Most cases are musculoskeletal, meaning the cause is an injury or strain to the bone, joint or the ligaments around it. The main causes, starting with the most common, are below.

Falls and Direct Injury

A hard fall onto your buttocks is one of the most common triggers. Slipping on ice, falling off a ladder or landing on a hard edge can **bruise**, **dislocate** or even **fracture** the coccyx, and inflame the ligaments that hold it to the sacrum. The pain often starts right away, but it can also appear a few days later as swelling develops.

Childbirth and Pregnancy

During labor, the baby's head presses against the coccyx and pushes it backward. This can strain or injure the joint and its ligaments, which is one reason coccyx pain is more common in women and often begins after delivery. **Pregnancy** itself can also cause tailbone discomfort, because the growing baby adds pressure to the pelvis and pregnancy hormones loosen the ligaments around it.

Repeated Pressure and Long Hours of Sitting

Small, repeated stresses can irritate the coccyx just as a single fall can. Sitting for long periods on a hard surface, leaning back so that the tailbone carries part of your weight, and activities like **cycling** or **rowing** can all inflame the area over time. Being overweight adds more load on the tailbone, which can make the pain more likely.

Coccyx Instability and Bone Spurs

When you sit, the coccyx normally bends forward by a small amount. When it bends or shifts too far, doctors call it **coccygeal instability**, and this can keep the area inflamed. Some people also develop a **bone spur** at the tip of the coccyx, which presses on the surrounding tissue and tends to become a long-term problem rather than a short-lived one.

Less Common Causes

Pain that feels like it comes from the tailbone may also arise from **arthritis**, an infection, or a **pilonidal cyst**, a pocket of skin near the top of the buttock crease that can become swollen and painful. Tight or overactive **pelvic floor muscles** can also pull on the coccyx and cause pain. A

tumor is a **rare** cause, but it is one reason doctors check the area carefully when the pain does not behave like a typical injury.

When No Cause Is Found

In many people, no clear cause is ever identified. Doctors call this **idiopathic coccydynia**. It does not mean the pain is imaginary or untreatable. It simply means treatment is chosen based on your symptoms and how you respond, rather than on one specific trigger.

Coccyx Pain Symptoms

The defining symptom of coccydynia is **localized pain at the base of the spine**, in the area between the buttocks just above the cleft. The pain can feel **dull and aching** or **sharp and stabbing**, and it usually has a recognizable pattern that separates it from other kinds of back or pelvic pain.

Main Symptoms of Coccyx Pain

- **Pain when sitting**, especially on hard surfaces or when leaning back, which is the most common complaint
- **Pain when standing up** from a seated position, often sharpest in the first few seconds
- **Tenderness when you press** on the tip of the tailbone
- **Relief when you stand or walk**, because weight comes off the coccyx
- **Pain during bowel movements**, which may ease afterward
- **Pain during intimacy**
- **Pain that is worse around menstruation**

Some people also notice **buttock or lower back discomfort** and **poor sleep** because they cannot find a comfortable position. When coccyx pain lasts for months, it can also come with low mood and anxiety, which is common with any long-lasting pain and worth mentioning to your doctor.

A Quick Self-Check

These questions will not diagnose you, but they show whether your pain fits the usual coccyx pattern. Coccydynia is more likely if:

1. The pain sits in the **midline at the very bottom of your spine**, not to one side or higher up in the back.

2. It is clearly **worse when you sit and better when you stand**.
3. The **tip of the tailbone is tender** when pressed.

If you answered yes to all three, coccydynia is a reasonable explanation. If your pain behaves differently, other conditions can mimic it.

Coccyx Pain vs Sciatica, Lower Back Pain and Other Conditions



Pain in this area has several look-alikes, and mistaking one for another can delay the right treatment. The table below shows the clues that usually separate them.

Condition	Where it hurts	Typical clues
Coccydynia	Midline, at the base of the spine	Worse sitting and rising, tender tailbone, eases on standing
Sciatica	Lower back or buttock, travelling down one leg	Burning or shooting pain, tingling or numbness in the leg. See our guide to sciatica pain when sitting
Lower back pain	Across the lower back, above the tailbone	Stiffness, pain when bending or lifting. See our lower back pain guide

Sacroiliac joint pain	One side of the lower back or upper buttock	Pain on one side, worse when climbing stairs or turning in bed
Hemorrhoids	Around the anus	Itching, bleeding or a lump, pain with bowel movements
Pilonidal cyst	Top of the buttock crease, slightly above the coccyx	Visible swelling, redness, or fluid drainage

Because these conditions overlap, a doctor can sometimes find that what looked like back pain or sciatica was coming from the coccyx all along.

How Coccyx Pain Is Diagnosed



Coccydynia is mainly diagnosed from your **medical history** and a **physical examination**. Imaging is only needed in selected cases, so a normal scan does not mean your pain is not real. You can start with a primary care doctor, who may refer you to an orthopedic spine specialist, a physical medicine and rehabilitation doctor or a pain specialist if the pain continues.

Medical History

Your doctor will ask when the pain started and whether it followed a **fall**, **childbirth** or a long period of cycling or rowing. They will also ask what makes it better or worse, how long you sit each day, whether bowel movements change the pain and whether you have any **fever**, **numbness** or **bladder and bowel changes**. Notes on these details make the visit more useful, so write them down beforehand.

Physical Examination

The most telling finding is **tenderness over the coccyx** when the doctor presses on it. The examination also checks the surrounding area for **fractures**, **lumps** and **abscesses**, which are pockets of infection. In some cases the doctor may add a gentle **rectal or pelvic exam** to assess the pelvic floor muscles and to rule out a mass. If the tailbone itself is not tender, your pain may be coming from another structure such as the lower back, the sacroiliac joint or a disc.

Imaging Tests

Imaging is used to rule out other causes or to look at how the coccyx moves, not to confirm that you are in pain.

- **X-rays** can show a fracture, a dislocation or a bone spur. **Dynamic X-rays**, taken while you sit and while you stand, can also show whether the coccyx bends or shifts too far. Sitting normally bends the coccyx forward by less than 20 degrees, and more movement than that points to instability.
- **MRI** can look for inflammation, infection or, rarely, a tumor such as a **chordoma**, which is a rare tumor of the spine. A bone scan may also be used for this purpose.

Diagnostic Injection

If the cause is still unclear, some doctors inject a small amount of **local anesthetic** around the coccyx. If the pain eases clearly afterward, that suggests the coccyx is the main source.

When to See a Doctor

Most coccyx pain improves on its own, but some signs mean you should not wait.

Get Urgent Medical Care If You Have

- **Numbness or tingling in your groin, legs or arms**

- **Trouble urinating or controlling your bowels**
- **A fever**, especially together with severe pain or swelling near the tailbone
- **A sore or swelling near the tailbone that is red, hot or draining pus**, which can point to an infected cyst or abscess
- **Severe pain after a hard fall**, particularly if you cannot sit or walk normally, since the coccyx may be fractured

Book an Appointment Soon If

- Your pain has lasted **longer than about eight weeks** despite changing how you sit and using simple pain relief
- The pain is **getting worse** or keeps you from sleeping, working or driving
- You notice **bleeding**, a **visible lump** or pain spreading to your hips, lower back or legs, which NI Direct also lists as reasons to see a GP
- You have lost **weight without trying** or feel generally unwell along with the pain
- The pain started during **pregnancy** or after **childbirth** and is not easing

A doctor can confirm that the coccyx is the source, rule out infection or a fracture and guide you to the right next step. If you are unsure, it is always reasonable to ask.

Choosing a Cushion While Your Tailbone Heals

A cushion cannot treat the cause of coccydynia, but it can ease the thing that hurts most, which is **pressure on the tailbone while you sit**. The goal is to let the coccyx **hover over an opening** so your weight rests on your sitting bones and thighs. Dr. Patrick Foye, a physician who specializes in coccyx pain, notes that wedge-shaped cushions are usually better than closed donut cushions. Look for an **open cut-out at the back**, **firm foam** that does not let you sink, a **non-slip base** and a firm, flat seat underneath.

The sitcushion Office Seat Cushion combines a **U-shaped coccyx cut-out**, **charcoal-infused memory foam**, a **non-slip base** and a **removable, washable cover**, and every sitcushion product comes with a **lifetime money-back guarantee**. Sitcushion products are designed for ergonomic support and comfort and are not medical devices. To learn how coccyx cushions work and how to sit on one correctly, read our guide to coccyx cushions for tailbone pain relief, or browse all sitcushion seat cushions.

Frequently Asked Questions About Coccyx Pain

What does coccyx pain feel like?

Coccyx pain is felt as a **localized ache or sharp pain at the very bottom of your spine**, in the middle, just above the cleft between your buttocks. It is usually **worse when you sit**, especially on hard seats or when leaning back, and when you **stand up from a chair**. Many people also find that the tip of the tailbone is **tender when pressed**, and that walking or standing brings relief. Pain that sits to one side, shoots down a leg or spreads across the lower back is more likely to come from somewhere else.

Can coccyx pain start without a fall or injury?

Yes. A fall is the most common trigger, but coccyx pain can also come from **repeated pressure** (long hours on a hard seat, cycling, rowing), **childbirth**, **bone spurs**, **joint instability** or tight **pelvic floor muscles**. In many people, doctors never find a clear cause, which is called **idiopathic coccydynia**. Not knowing the cause does not mean the pain cannot be treated, because treatment is based on your symptoms.

How can I tell if my tailbone is bruised, broken or just sore?

You usually **cannot tell by how it feels**, because a bruise, a dislocation and a fracture can all cause similar pain, swelling and difficulty sitting. A doctor can tell the difference with an **X-ray**. If the pain began after a **hard fall** and you cannot sit or walk normally, get it checked, since a fracture should be confirmed. For a mild bruise, the early steps are often similar: take pressure off the area, use cold then heat, and give it time.

Why does it hurt most when I stand up from sitting?

When you sit, the coccyx **bends forward slightly** and takes some pressure, and when you stand, the coccyx moves back and the **pelvic floor muscles attached to it tighten**. On an irritated tailbone, that movement can cause a sharp jolt for the first few seconds. To reduce it, **lean forward**, shift your weight onto your feet and stand up **slowly** instead of pushing up quickly from a leaned-back position. A cushion with a cut-out can also reduce the pressure that builds while you sit.

Is coccyx pain a sign of something serious like cancer?

Almost never. Most coccyx pain comes from an injury, strain or pressure on the area, and cancer in or near the coccyx is a **rare** cause. Still, certain signs call for a prompt check: pain that keeps **getting worse** and is no longer linked to sitting, a **visible lump** near the tailbone, **numbness or tingling** in the legs or groin, **trouble controlling urine or bowels**, **fever** or **unexplained weight**

loss. If you have any of these, see a doctor soon. Otherwise, coccydynia is a common and manageable condition.

Final Thoughts on Coccyx Pain

Coccyx pain is uncomfortable and often frustrating, but it is also common, well understood and usually temporary. It most often follows a **fall**, **childbirth** or long-term pressure on the tailbone, and it tends to be worst when you **sit** or **stand up from a seat**. Knowing what is behind your pain, and which warning signs need a doctor, is the first step toward the right treatment. For more guides on sitting comfort and pain-free living, visit the sitcushion Knowledge Center.