Pelvic Fractures

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Transforming patient information into patient understanding.

These injuries are not understood by most patients. Of course everyone knows that there is a structure called the pelvis which connects the spine with the legs at the hips. They have a vague idea of what it looks like from Halloween skeletons, etc. But that’s about it right?

Our pelvis consist of three separate parts on each side called ilium, ischium and pelvic bones. They join together in back and front and comprise the pelvic ring. While the hip sockets are part of the pelvis it will get too complicated to consider hip socket fractures here with the other pelvic fractures.

Fractures

It can be said of pelvic fractures that they are simple or complicated. Simple fractures more often occur in older patients who lose their balance and fall. Pelvic fractures are much more common in the elderly.

Complicated fractures can happen at all ages and usually occur from falling from a height or a motor vehicle accident.

Simple Fractures

These fractures typically involve the pubic bones which are in front of the pelvis where the pelvic ring comes together. The pubic bones are more slender than the other pelvic bones and they “crack” when we fall on one side of the body or the other. Fortunate is the person who falls and has a simple pelvic fracture rather than a hip fracture.

The difference is that most hip fractures that I see require surgery to repair them whereas simple pelvic fractures rarely need surgery.

These pelvic fractures can be initially as painful as a hip fracture so it is not clear at first which has occurred.

Complicated Fractures

These fractures often involve the larger portions of the pelvis, the ilium and less frequently the ischium. They are complicated because the bone can be too separated to allow for natural healing.

Other patterns are where the pelvis is separated from the sacrum which is the lower part of the spine. In the front of the pelvis where the pubic bones come together the pelvic ring can be completely separated and even cause injury to the bladder just behind it or to pelvic organs.

Danger Lurks

High energy pelvic fractures from a motor vehicle accident can be life threatening. They can be open fractures or cause injury to pelvic vessels resulting in profuse bleeding, shock and death. They can only be managed at a large trauma center which has the resources needed to optimize patient survival.

Treatment

The treatment of pelvic fractures depends on the degree of stability of the pelvic bones.
Stable Fractures (Simple)
These fractures are low energy and caused by falls. They are diagnosed in the Emergency Department by plain x-rays and often CT scan. Treatment consists of pain medication, relative rest and early protected weight bearing with a walker for about 6 weeks.

Unstable Fractures (Complicated)
When the patient’s condition is stabilized, surgery is usually required to treat organ injuries and repair fractures with a variety of metal devices. Recovery can take many months of limited activities and physical/occupational therapy.

I think you can appreciate that there are a wide variety of pelvic injuries that can occur. Hopefully you won’t need to find out about them first hand.

My patients put their trust in me and what I do improves the quality of their lives.

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All of the information pertains to everything I treat in the office and hospital.
Be well.

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