



Student Health Center UNC Wilmington

INSTRUCTION SHEET: FRACTURED COCCYX (TAILBONE)

The Student Health Provider has diagnosed a fracture (break) of your coccyx (tailbone).

The coccyx is the bottom part of the spine. The spine functions to protect the spinal cord, the nerve bundle connecting the brain to the rest of the body. Fortunately, the spinal cord ends above the level of the coccyx, so injury to the spinal cord is not a complication of a broken tailbone.

Symptoms of a broken coccyx consist of pain and swelling in the area of the tailbone. Pain is increased by pressure on the tailbone, as in sitting on a hard surface.

No special treatment is necessary for a fractured coccyx. Time will heal the break. Pain typically lasts four to six weeks, but with each passing week the pain is less.

MEASURES YOU SHOULD TAKE TO HELP TREAT YOUR COCCYX INJURY:

- 1- Rest at home. Give your body time to heal.
- 2- Avoid sitting as possible. Sit on soft surfaces when necessary. A foam donut-ring apparatus can be purchased at a pharmacy or medical supply store. The donut apparatus allows sitting without pressure on the coccyx.
- 3- Apply a cold pack to the coccyx off and on for two days after injury. Cold helps reduce pain and swelling. Do not apply ice directly to the coccyx if it causes discomfort. Aim for coolness, yet comfort, applying a layer or two of towel between the cold pack and coccyx.
- 4- After two days, apply heat in the form of warm soaks. Moist heat increases circulation in the tissues, promoting healing.
- 5- Over-the-counter pain medications can relieve discomfort associated with a broken coccyx. Acetaminophen (Tylenol), ibuprofen, or naproxen can be taken, depending on individual preference.
- 6- The provider may prescribe stronger pain medication. Take the prescription medicine only if needed. The medication can cause drowsiness, so perform no dangerous tasks (driving, operating machinery, etc.) while taking the medication.
- 7- Passing hard bowel movements can increase pain. The injury itself, as well as prescription pain medicine, may cause constipation. To prevent hard stools and constipation, consume a diet high in fiber (fresh fruits and vegetables, whole wheat bread, bran cereal). Stool softeners of natural vegetable substances are also safe and effective: Look for over-the-counter preparations containing psyllium or methylcellulose.
- 8- Make a follow-up appointment with your personal/referral doctor in the next week. Take the X-rays to your appointment.
- 9- If you are having severe pain or an unusual problem, return to the Student Health Center or see your personal/referral doctor promptly.