Femoroacetabular impingement, otherwise known as Hip Impingement, is a far more common problem of the hip joint than we know. Many men and women of varying ages and athletic levels can suffer from this impairment.

What is Hip Impingement?

Hip impingement is a disorder in which the ball and socket of the hip joint do not fit properly together. There is either too much bone on the socket, the ball or both. This can cause short and long term damage to the cartilage and the labrum.

What structures in the hip are involved?

Cartilage is the protective coating in our joints that allow smooth, pain-free motion of one bone against another.
The labrum is a rubbery material that outlines the rim of the socket and acts as a shock absorber or cushion for the joint.

With hip impingement the labrum can tear and the cartilage can become worn from being pinched between the excess bone of the ball and socket. This places one at risk for developing early arthritis of the hip. This is why early detection of this problem is critical.

Who gets Hip Impingement?

This is still unclear. It may just be the way one is made. It may also develop from a previous injury or trauma, or repetitive overuse from sport and activity. Hip impingement is ideally diagnosed in the teens or twenties. If it is identified at a later age, unfortunately it may be too late and advanced arthritis may already be present requiring a total hip replacement.
Why is Hip Impingement so easy to miss?

Hip impingement is a great masquerader. Oftentimes it is misdiagnosed presenting as low back pain, knee pain or can be confused with a hip flexor strain. Many athletes can go undiagnosed for years. Early detection is critical to a good outcome.

What does Hip Impingement and Labral Tears feel like?

Patients typically complain of a dull ache or sharp pain in the groin that is worsened by athletic activity. Pain can be associated with deep flexion, prolonged sitting, sitting with the legs crossed or moving from a seated to a standing position. The hip may feel “stiff” with decreased flexibility. There may be low back pain and buttocks pain as well. The pain can be worse with pivoting, cutting or twisting motions as seen in hockey players, soccer players and ballet. However, it can occur in any sport.

How do you treat Hip Impingement?

After the appropriate testing, physical exams and imaging (typically x-rays and a special MRI with dye injected into the hip joint) are performed to confirm the diagnosis; treatment can either be conservative with physical therapy, or surgery with minimally-invasive hip arthroscopy. Hip arthroscopy is an outpatient surgery in which two small incisions are made to insert a camera and small instruments into the joint space to repair the torn labrum and contour the misshapen bone.

Hip arthroscopy is a very specialized procedure. I am fellowship-trained in operative and non-operative Sports Medicine with an emphasis on hip impingement and various other hip and pelvic related disorders. I was one of the first orthopedic surgeons in the region to offer these specialized procedures. Early detection and appropriate treatment of this disorder can improve outcomes and success rates and can allow the return to full activity and sport for athletes.

If you would like a consultation, please call me at 401 218-6035 or request an appointment online.