

Growing pains

Information for patients, parents and guardians

Growing pains are aches, pains or discomfort felt in the legs. Although they can be distressing, growing pains do not cause long-term harm. These pains often start in children at the age of about four years, but may start later, up to the age of 12 years.

Cause of leg pain

Growing pains are also known as 'idiopathic pains of childhood'. The word idiopathic means that the cause is unknown, but it is thought the pain is due to the child growing, especially at the time of a growth spurt. During growth the bones grow faster than the soft tissue, muscles, tendons and ligaments. This can cause stretching and tightness in the muscles which then ache. The pains will settle but may return as your child grows more.

Symptoms

Your child may complain of pain in the front of their thighs (the top of the leg), in their calves (the back of the lower part of the leg) or behind the knees. It is usually felt in both legs, often at the end of the day or during the night. Growing pains may be worse after an active day, and may disrupt your child's sleep. By the next morning they are usually pain-free and able to continue normal activities. These symptoms may happen several times a week and can last for 12 to 18 months.

At the hospital

If you are referred to the hospital, we will ask you to give a history of your child's pain and will examine them. Your child may need an x-ray and a blood test. Usually the history, examination and tests do not show any cause for concern and no further tests or treatment will be needed. With time the symptoms will get better.

What can be done to help

Resting and taking simple pain-relieving medication such as paracetamol or ibuprofen should relieve the symptoms. Vitamin D supplements have also been shown to help. A recommended dose is 400 IU (international units) each day. For more information, visit www.patient.co.uk and search for 'vitamin D'.

Normal childhood activities will not do any damage to your child's legs.

Follow-up

It is not always necessary for us to see your child again, although in some cases another appointment may be needed. We may ask you to keep a diary of when your child has the pain.

If you know of anything that seems to bring the pain on – or helps to relieve it – we suggest you write it down, as this information can be helpful in managing your child's pain.

If you have any questions or concerns please contact:

Nurse practitioners on telephone: 023 8120 4991 or mobile: 07584 402438

Main switchboard: 023 8077 7222 bleep 2641

Ward G3: 023 8120 6486

If you need a translation of this document, an interpreter or a version in large print, Braille or on audiotape, please telephone **023 8120 4688** for help.

www.uhs.nhs.uk/childrenshospital