

Growing pains (also called night pains)

Introduction

The aim of this leaflet is to answer some of the questions that you or your child may have about growing pains. You will also have an opportunity to discuss any further concerns with us in clinic.

What are growing pains?

Aches and pains are often called "growing pains" or "idiopathic" (of unknown cause) benign (harmless) nocturnal (night time) limb pains. They are relatively common in children from ages 2-8 years.



What are the symptoms?

They are typical after an active day; the child falls asleep normally but wakes after a few hours with pain in the lower legs. It tends to move around sometimes affecting the knees, sometimes the shins. Very occasionally it can be in the arms.

What is the cause?

It is not clear and the cause remains unknown. The most likely explanation is that the aches and discomfort arise from muscles used from normal jumping, climbing and running activities earlier in the day. This is why some have moved away from the term 'growing pains'.

Does my child need further investigations?

The characteristic history and the lack of clinical findings examining the child are typical, and the diagnosis can usually be made confidently without subjecting them to any uncomfortable tests. Joints affected by more serious pathology are usually swollen, red, tender, or warm, whereas the joints of children experiencing growing pains appear normal. If there is any doubt at all, more serious arthritic and other conditions can be excluded with simple blood tests and X-rays or an MRI scan of the painful areas.

What is the treatment?

It is important for the child and parents to understand that although the pains may seem severe and distressing, they are not harmful and will go away in time. When they occur most children find local warmth and massage of the leg soothing and that may be all that is needed.

If the pattern is for the pain to persist for longer, then it can be helpful to give a dose of Paracetamol (Calpol), which should bring relief in about 15 minutes. Parents can sometimes predict which nights the child may get pain, dependent on the activities that day. If that is the case it is safe to give pain relief before bedtime. Use the recommended doses for the age of your child.

What is the outlook?

Growing pains virtually never become any serious form of arthritis or other disease. They may remain troublesome for a while, but they seem to disappear as mysteriously as they came.

Contact us

If you require any further advice please contact:

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More information

Visit the Trust website at www.royalberkshire.nhs.uk

This document can be made available in other languages and formats upon request.

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