

# Childhood Growing Pains

Information for patients, parents and carers

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## What are growing pains?

Growing pains are a common cause of recurring discomfort in children. They are aches, usually felt in the legs.

The pains usually occur in the evening or night. The pain can sometimes be bad enough to wake up your child in the night.

Usually growing pains occur in the legs, particularly:

- In the back of the leg below the knee (the calf)
- At the front of the leg below the knee (the shin)
- Around the ankles
- At the front of the leg above the knee (the thigh).

Growing pains are usually felt in both legs but sometimes one more than the other, they are often felt in the areas between the joints, rather than in the joints themselves. They are not serious, and settle in time of their own accord.

## What causes growing pains?

It is not known what causes growing pains. They are not always caused by growing so 'growing pains' can sometimes be a confusing term. Various theories about the cause have been tested in studies but none have been proven. Growing pains are sometimes more common in active children. It is possible that the pains are due to the effect of lots of activity on muscles and bones but do not cause damage so you do not have to restrict your child's activity levels.

It is important to remember that growing pains do not develop into anything serious and do not do the child any harm.

Some research studies have suggested that growing pains might have a connection to vitamin D levels (especially living in Scotland). Multivitamins or vitamin D supplements sometimes seem to help with growing pains.

## Who gets growing pains?

Growing pains usually affect children between the ages of 3 and 12 years. Up to half of all children may experience growing at some point.

## What are the signs of growing pains?

There are no signs. If there is anything unusual to see in the area of the pain the cause is probably not growing pains and you should contact your GP.

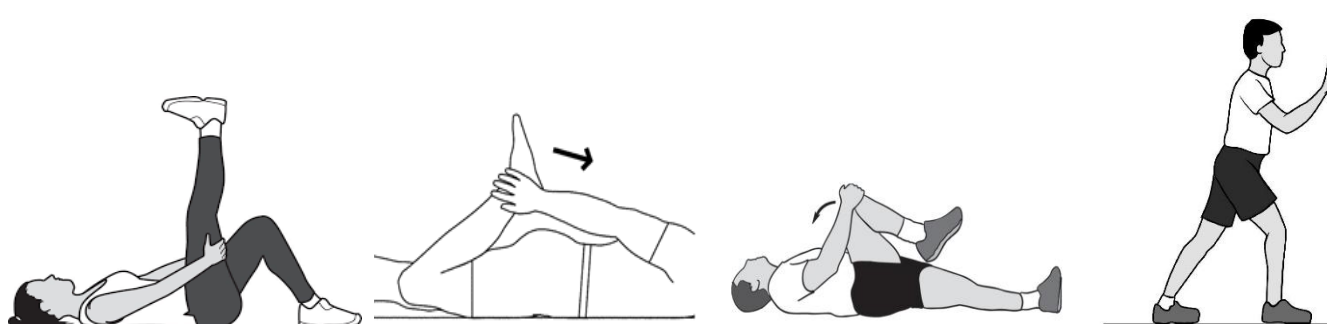
## Are any tests needed?

Usually no tests are needed for growing pains. A doctor or physiotherapist can usually diagnose growing pains from your description and a physical examination. There should be nothing unusual to find on examination of a child with growing pains. Blood tests and x-rays would be normal in a child with growing pains so there is no need to do these tests unless there are symptoms or signs suggesting other causes.

## What treatment is there for growing pains?

Simple pain relief and reassurance is usually all that is needed. In time growing pains should settle of their own accord, this can take months and sometimes years however. Sometimes the pains come and go during this time before completely settling.

Sometimes gentle massage to the area can help with the pain. Other children also find that gentle stretches can also help. Try the following stretches to see if they help your child's pain:



Hold each of the above stretches for 30 seconds and repeat 2-3 times on each leg.

## When should I see a doctor about growing pains?

If your child develops a limp, has warm swollen joints, has signs of stiffness in the morning, or a temperature with their pains, contact your GP.

## Further advice and contact details

If you feel you do need further advice you can contact the physiotherapy department with the details below:

### Physiotherapy Team

Therapies Department  
Royal Hospital for Children and Young People  
50 Little France Crescent  
Edinburgh  
EH16 4SA

Telephone: **0131 312 1079**