Growing Pains in Children

What is normal, and the signs that are not

Tips from your physiotherapist at Ace Sports Medicine

ACE SPORTS MEDICINE
UPPER MOUNT GRAVATT

Growing pains are one of the most common causes of recurring limb pain in childhood. An Australian study found 36.9 percent of South Australian children aged 4 to 6 met criteria. The pattern is distinctive, and so are the exceptions.

WHAT PARENTS SHOULD KNOW ABOUT GROWING PAINS

1 THE CLASSIC PATTERN

Aching in both legs, usually the shins, calves or thighs, arriving late in the day or waking the child at night, and settling with rubbing and reassurance.

BOTH LEGS, EVENINGS, SETTLES WITH A RUB.

2 FINE NEXT MORNING

The defining feature: the child wakes up completely fine and runs around normally all day. Morning symptoms do not fit the growing pains pattern.

NORMAL MORNINGS ARE THE KEY SIGN.

3 HOW COMMON

36.9 percent of South Australian children aged 4 to 6 met criteria for growing pains in a landmark Australian study. It is a normal part of many childhoods.

COMMON, BENIGN AND MANAGEABLE.

4 NOT CAUSED BY GROWTH

Despite the name, the evidence does not show pain is caused by growth itself. Growing pains are a diagnosis of exclusion made on the pattern plus a normal examination.

THE NAME IS TRADITIONAL, NOT LITERAL.

5 WHAT HELPS TONIGHT

Gentle massage, warmth, calm reassurance and a normal bedtime routine. The pain settles, and activity the next day should continue as usual.

RUB, REASSURE, CARRY ON TOMORROW.

6 THE RED FLAGS

One-sided pain, limping, morning symptoms, swelling, fever, night sweats, or a child who is unwell or off their food take it out of the growing pains pattern.

ANY OF THESE MEANS GET IT CHECKED.

DOES MY CHILD NEED A SCAN?

Not for the classic pattern. Growing pains are diagnosed on the story and a normal examination. Imaging and tests are for the exceptions: one-sided pain, limping, morning symptoms, swelling or an unwell child, arranged through assessment or your GP.

WHEN TO SEEK HELP

- Pain in one leg rather than both
- Limping, or pain during the day
- Pain or stiffness in the morning
- Swelling, redness or a warm joint
- Fever, night sweats or weight loss
- A child who is unwell or off their food

The pattern is benign. The exceptions are the whole point of this page.

WHAT CAN A PHYSIOTHERAPIST DO?

- Take a structured history of the pattern
- Examine joints, muscles and walking
- Confirm the features that fit, and any that do not
- Reassure without dismissing
- Guide activity, sport and flexibility
- Coordinate GP referral when a red flag appears

WHAT PARENTS CAN DO NOW

If the evenings are rough, there is a calm order to follow:

Keep sport and play going | **Rub, warmth and reassurance** | **Note the pattern for a week** | **Book a check if flags appear**

Please discuss specifics at an appointment or with your family GP.

Helping You Perform at Your Best

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Need support with your child's leg pain?

Book your appointment today

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