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Information for parents  
and children about

# Growing pains



Acute Paediatric Physiotherapy Department

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## What are growing pains?

Almost two out of every five children experience growing pains. Some children are affected more than others. There are plenty of theories about the causes, but no one is sure. The most common theory is that children's bones grow quicker than the muscles, leading to tightness and tension of the soft tissues. There are also links to levels of activity. You may notice after a particularly active day your child's pain may be worse.

Growing pains are usually located in the shin, calf complex, thighs, or behind the knees. It is almost always in both legs. The pain will usually start late in the day or around bedtime and can sometimes wake your child at night. They can last from a few minutes to hours depending on their severity.

## How can you help?

Growing pains should settle down with:

- gentle massage
- heat pad/hot bath before bed
- stretching exercises
- pain relief

## Stretches

(hold for 30 seconds and repeat three times on each leg, twice a day)

### Hamstring stretch

Get your child to lie on their back with their legs out straight. Lift one leg, keeping the knee straight and gently apply pressure to the bottom of the foot pushing it towards them. They should feel a gentle pulling in the back of their leg.



### Calf stretch

With your child lying on their back with their knees straight, gently push the sole of the foot towards their body until they feel a pull in the calf muscle.

### Quads stretch

With your child lying on their tummy, gently flex the knee bringing the heel towards the bottom until they feel a pulling in the muscle on the front of the thigh.



## Vitamin D

Vitamin D is essential in the development and maintenance of healthy bones as it enables our bones to absorb calcium. Vitamin D has been shown to have very positive effects on growing pains. It has been noted to reduce the intensity and frequency of pain. Giving your child a daily supplement of vitamin D is advisable. For over 5's at least 10 mcg of vitamin D daily is recommended.

## Long term outcome

Growing pains may come and go until your child has finished growing.

### See your GP if:

- there is any rash, swelling, bruising, redness, or heat in joints.
- pain does not improve with pain relief, massage, or stretches.
- there is night pain that does not settle.
- your child is limping.
- your child is less active than normal or very fatigued.
- the pain is in the mornings.
- the joints ache.
- they have a high temperature