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Growing pains

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Summary

- Many children have pains in their legs without any obvious cause and these are often called growing pains.
- Even though the child can be in a lot of pain, no damage is happening to the child's bones or muscles, and growing pains can respond to simple treatments.
- Most children who do lots of exercise don't get pain, and many children with pain have not been doing more exercise than usual.
- Always see your doctor to make sure that there is no other cause of pain.

Growing pains are real but essentially harmless muscular pain that can affect children between the ages of three and five years, and from eight to 11 years. Boys and girls are equally affected.

Some young people may continue to experience growing pains into their early adolescence or teenage years. Pain may be experienced in the legs – often the calf, front of thigh or behind the knees – and is often worse in the afternoon or evening. Sometimes, the pain can wake a child from their sleep. The cause is not known.

Even though the child can be in a lot of pain, no damage is happening to the child's bones or muscles, and growing pains can respond to simple treatments.

Symptoms of growing pains

The symptoms of growing pains include:

- Muscular aches and pains are felt in both legs – typically in the calf, behind the knee and in the front of the thigh.
- Moving the legs does not make the pain better or worse, which shows that the joints are not affected.
- The pain comes and goes, occurring perhaps every night for a week or so, or a few times a week, or only occasionally.
- The onset of pain is around the late afternoon or evening.
- The pain is worse during the night, particularly when the child is supposed to be going to sleep.
- The pain may be severe enough to wake the child from sleep.
- The pain is gone by morning.
- The pain doesn't cause a limp or make it hard to run and play normally.
- Occasionally, the muscles of the arms may be affected as well.
- The child may also complain of headaches.

Causes of growing pains

The cause of growing pains is unclear. It is often mistakenly thought that the pain is caused by the growth of bones. Yet bones grow slowly, even during growth spurts, and this slow growth does not cause pain.

Some children have growing pains on and off for many years, but usually they go by mid-adolescence. For some children, there is more pain after they have been doing a lot of running and playing, but not all children have this pattern of play then pain.

The pain may be due to:

- Muscular tiredness – more physical activity than usual can be linked to more aching muscles for some children, although all children have some days when they do a lot more things than other days and most do not get pain.
- Poor posture – standing, sitting or walking awkwardly puts greater than usual strain on the supporting muscles of the body. Sometimes, children whose feet roll in (with very flat feet) may have more trouble with pains than other children.
- Emotional upset – stress or unhappiness may trigger aches and pains, but this is not often the case for many children who have pain.

Growing pains do not affect how a child walks and runs and they do not make a child unwell. If your child is limping, is complaining of pain during the day, is unwell or if the leg is sore to touch, you need to get your child checked by a doctor. They may have an infection or an injury.

Diagnosis of growing pains

Growing pains are diagnosed by ruling out all other causes of leg pain. Other health problems that can cause pain in the legs include:

- arthritis – which damages joints
- infections (such as osteomyelitis) and some virus infections (such as Ross River virus)
- problems that affect how the muscles work together – such as knock knees and very flat feet.

Always see your doctor if your child:

- has severe pain or pain that only affects one leg (or arm), or if the pain is still there during the day
- is unwell or has a fever, loss of appetite or rashes
- has swelling, reddening or tenderness of the leg or arm
- is limping.

Treatment for growing pains

Always see your doctor to make sure that there is no other cause of pain. Things that may help your child manage the pain include:

- plenty of cuddles and reassurance that the pain will go away and that their legs will feel normal by morning
- massaging the painful area using special massage oils (this is not necessary to easing the pain, but may help your child feel special)
- heat treatment, such as warm baths and heat packs
- medicines that reduce pain, such as paracetamol (check the bottle to make sure that you give the right dose)
- if your child has feet that roll in or if they trip a lot, ask a podiatrist to check their legs and posture
- don't tell the child that the pain is associated with playing or growing, or else the child may feel afraid of both.

Where to get help

- Your doctor
- Pharmacist
- Maternal and child health nurse
- Paediatrician

Things to remember

- Many children have pains in their legs without any obvious cause and these are often called growing pains.
- Even though the child can be in a lot of pain, no damage is happening to the child's bones or muscles, and growing pains can respond to simple treatments.
- Most children who do lots of exercise don't get pain, and many children with pain have not been doing more exercise than usual.
- Always see your doctor to make sure that there is no other cause of pain.

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- [Growth charts for children](#)
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- [Immunisation – deciding which vaccines you need](#)
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[You can help your child overcome anxiety by taking their fears seriously and encouraging them to talk about their feelings...](#)

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[Parents can help with bullying by supporting their child and involving the authorities to find solutions...](#)

- [Children and literacy](#)

[Your child is literate if they know how to speak, read and write their language with confidence...](#)

- [Children and shyness](#)

[If your child's shyness is especially debilitating, you may like to consider professional help from a counsellor or psychologist...](#)

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[Sibling rivalry is a common problem, particularly among children who are the same sex and close together in age...](#)

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[Children with untreated conduct disorder are at increased risk of problems including substance use, personality disorders and mental illnesses...](#)

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[Receptive language disorder means the child has difficulties with understanding what is said to them...](#)

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- [Breakfast](#)

[Children who skip breakfast may lack sufficient vitamins and minerals including iron, calcium, zinc and vitamin B2...](#)

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[Childcare centres should provide healthy meals for your children...](#)

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[If you eat and enjoy fruit and vegetables every day, your child may eventually follow your lead...](#)

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- [Food for sport - tucker talk tips](#)

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[Simple ways to make your child's school lunch healthier...](#)

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[A good balance between exercise and food intake is important to maintain a healthy body weight...](#)

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[Healthy foods that are great for school lunch boxes...](#)

- [Lunch boxes - healthy shopping ideas \(video\)](#)

[Victorian State Public Health Nutritionist Veronica Graham takes us shopping for the right foods to include in your child's lunchbox...](#)

- [Lunch boxes - how to make them healthy \(video\)](#)

[Victorian State Public Health Nutritionist Veronica Graham shares three healthy and delicious lunchbox examples for the kids and provides some great food preparation tips to save you time throughout...](#)

- [Lunch boxes - menu planner](#)

[By planning ahead, you can make sure that your child's lunch box has each of the six key elements of a healthy lunchbox...](#)

- [Lunch box tips](#)

[Encourage children to help choose and prepare their own healthy snack or lunch...](#)

- [Soft drinks, juice and sweet drinks - children](#)

[Encourage children to drink and enjoy water. Sweet drinks such as juice, cordial and soft drinks may cause health problems for children if consumed in large amounts...](#)

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[New Year's resolutions and how to stick to them...](#)

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[Children can eat a vegetarian diet and stay healthy as long as their extra nutritional needs are met...](#)

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[Physical activity is an important part of health and wellbeing, and girls should remain active as they grow up...](#)

- [Sport and children](#)

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[Once children are overweight, it takes a lot of effort for them to return to a healthy weight...](#)

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[If your child is overweight, you can help by making healthier lifestyle choices for yourself...](#)

- [Overweight children - healthy lifestyle tips](#)

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[Mild vomiting is normal in most babies and improves over time...](#)
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[Many parents worry when their child with diabetes starts or returns to school...](#)
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[Fever is a way in which the body fights infection. A fever is not dangerous and does not always indicate a serious illness...](#)
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[Gastroenteritis or Gastro can be dangerous for very young babies. Gastro is common in young children and spreads easily. Gastro is a bowel infection which causes diarrhoea \(runny or watery poo\) and...](#)
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[No product can prevent head lice, but regular checks can help prevent the spread...](#)
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- [Pinworms](#)

[Despite the unsavoury reputation, a pinworm infection \(worms\) is relatively harmless and easily treated...](#)

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- [Animals and child safety](#)

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[By making a few practical changes to your home, you can dramatically reduce the risk of injury to your child...](#)

- [Child safety – at home](#)

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- [Playgrounds and child safety](#)

[Play environments can be safe and beneficial for your child. With proper planning, you can make sure your child gets plenty of playtime activity...](#)

- [Poisoning and child safety](#)

[Call the Poisons Information Centre on 13 11 26 immediately if you suspect your child has been poisoned or given the wrong medicine or the wrong dose of medicine...](#)

- [Road and traffic safety for children](#)

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[Scooters can travel at fast speeds and falls and collisions are disturbingly common...](#)

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[Toddlers are most at risk of drowning because they are mobile and curious but don't understand the danger of water...](#)

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Bringing Up Great Kids

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