Summary

The hip joint is the largest joint of the human body. The hips can be affected by a wide range of disorders including arthritis, irritable hip syndrome and slipped capital femoral epiphysis. Pain around the hip may be due to soft tissue pain syndromes or referred pain from a back problem. Treatment options depend on the cause but may include medication, exercise, splinting and surgery.

Symptoms of hip problems

Symptoms of a hip problem may include:
- pain in the hip joint (usually felt in the groin area)
- referred pain to the thigh and knee
- limping
- reduced range of motion
- muscle stiffness
- pain when trying to put weight through the leg on the affected side.

Causes of hip problems

There are many condition that may cause hip problems, such as:
- osteoarthritis
- rheumatoid arthritis
- ankylosing spondylitis
- bone fracture
- developmental dysplasia of the hip
- Perthes’ disease
- slipped capital femoral epiphysis
- irritable hip syndrome.

Osteoarthritis

Osteoarthritis is associated with degeneration of the joint cartilage and with changes in the bones underlying the joint. The cartilage becomes brittle and splits. Some pieces may break away and float around inside the synovial fluid within the joint. This can lead to inflammation.

Eventually, the cartilage can break down so much that it no longer cushions the two bones. Current theory suggests that the cartilage loses its elasticity because of cellular changes. Commonly affected joints include those of the hip, spine, shoulder, fingers, knees, ankles, feet and toes.

Rheumatoid arthritis

Rheumatoid arthritis is an immune condition that causes inflammation in moving joints (synovial joints).

Although people who develop rheumatoid arthritis may have a predisposition to the condition, the ‘trigger’ for developing symptoms is unknown.

Inflammation in joints results in an increase in synovial fluid (swelling of the joint), pain and morning joint stiffness. Joints that can be affected include those of the hands and wrists, elbows, shoulders, neck, jaw, hips, knees, ankles and feet.

Ankylosing spondylitis

This uncommon form of inflammatory arthritis can target the spine, knees and hips. Typical symptoms include pain and stiffness first thing in the morning. The cause
unknown, but genes are thought to play a significant role.

Ankylosing spondylitis can occur by itself or in association with other disorders, including Crohn’s disease, ulcerative colitis and psoriasis. Caucasian men aged between 16 and 33 years are most susceptible.

Bone fracture

Older people are more prone to hip fractures because bones become less dense as we age. In some cases, a person develops osteoporosis – a disease characterised by the excessive loss of bone tissue. The bones become soft and brittle, and prone to fractures and deformities. More women than men experience osteoporosis.

Developmental dysplasia of the hip

Developmental dysplasia of the hip means that the hip joint of a newborn baby is dislocated or prone to dislocation. The socket is abnormally shallow, which prevents a stable fit. Slack ligaments may also allow the femoral head to slip out of joint.

Possible causes include a breech (feet first) delivery, family history and disorders such as spina bifida. Around 95 per cent of babies born with developmental dysplasia of the hip can be successfully treated.

Perthes’ disease

Perthes’ disease is a disease of the hip joint. It tends to affect children between the ages of three and 11 years. The ball of the femur is softened, and ultimately damaged, due to an inadequate blood supply to the bone cells.

Most children with Perthes’ disease eventually recover, but it can take anywhere from two to five years for the femoral head to regenerate. The cause is unknown.

Slipped capital femoral epiphysis

During childhood, the femoral ball is attached to the femur with a growth plate of bone. In some teenagers, the ball can slide from its proper position, causing the leg on the affected side to turn out from the body.

Possible contributing factors include the shape and location of the femoral head in relation to the femur, increased sex hormones during puberty, and weight gain. Without treatment, slipped capital femoral epiphysis will worsen and the child may experience arthritis of the hip joint in later life.

Irritable hip syndrome

Irritable hip syndrome (sometimes called toxic synovitis) is a temporary form of arthritis, which tends to affect prepubescent children for unknown reasons. Boys with toxic synovitis outnumber girls four to one. Symptoms include hip pain (usually on one side only), inability to walk (or limping), knee pain and fever. Most cases of toxic synovitis resolve by themselves within one or two weeks.

Soft tissue pain and referred pain

Pain that can appear to be coming from the hip joint may, in fact, be related to soft tissue structures around the hip such as muscles, tendons and bursae, or may be referred from a back problem.

Pain experienced over the side of the hip may be due to trochanteric bursitis.

Diagnosing hip problems

Depending on the cause, diagnosis of a hip problem can involve a number of tests including:

- medical history
- physical examination
- x-rays
- ultrasound scans
- bone scans
- biopsy
- blood tests.

Treatment options for hip problems

There are various treatment options for hip problems, depending on the underlying cause:

- for all forms of arthritis there are non-pharmacological treatment options – treatments that do not involve medications – such as exercise programs, education and self-management programs. Specific treatments are available for different types of arthritis. For osteoarthritis, the most common type of arthritis, simple pain-relieving medication is often effective. Joint replacement surgery (hip or knee) may be the best option for people with severe osteoarthritis
- rheumatoid arthritis and ankylosing spondylitis usually require more complex medical treatment, such as anti-inflammatory medications and disease-modifying medicines. Some people may also require surgical procedures
- fracture treatment includes admission to hospital and surgery
- for babies with developmental dysplasia of the hip a special harness is worn for between six and 12 weeks to hold the joint in place while the baby’s skeleton grows and matures
- Perthes’ disease – options include bed rest, pain-relieving medication, a brace or splint (worn for between one and two years to encourage the regrowing femoral head to sit inside the socket) and surgery to treat deformities
- slipped capital femoral epiphysis – surgery can reposition the femoral head and screw it firmly into place
- irritable hip syndrome – options include bed rest, pain-relieving medications and non-steroidal anti-inflammatory medications (NSAIDs)
- soft tissue pain – local symptomatic measures such as an exercise program, anti-inflammatory creams and simple pain-relieving medications may help soft tissue
pain.

Where to get help

- Your GP (doctor)
- Rheumatologist
- Paediatrician
- Musculoskeletal Australia National Help Line Tel. (03) 8531 8000 or 1800 263 265

References


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Bones muscles and joints

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- Bone muscle and joint basics
- Healthy bones muscles and joints
- Bone and bone marrow conditions
- Osteoporosis
- Muscle conditions
- Joint conditions
- Hand and foot conditions
- Back neck and spine conditions

Bone muscle and joint basics

- **Bone marrow**
  Bone marrow is the spongy tissue in the hollow centres of a person’s long bones and is the blood cell ‘factory’.

- **Bones**
  The adult skeleton is made up of 206 bones, which provide the structure for our bodies.

- **Choosing the right shoe**
  The right footwear can help keep your feet healthy, make your physical activity easier and help keep your body safe from injury.

- **Growth hormone**
  Some athletes and bodybuilders wrongly believe that taking synthetic growth hormone will help build up their muscles.

- **Joints**
  A joint is the part of the body where two or more bones meet to allow movement.

- **Locomotor system**
  The skeleton and skeletal muscles work together to allow movement.

- **Muscles**
  There are about 600 muscles in the human body.

Healthy bones muscles and joints

- **10 tips for getting enough vitamin D**
  A balanced UV approach is required to ensure some sun exposure for vitamin D while minimising the risk of skin cancer.

- **10 tips for safe stretching**
  Make stretching part of your life.

- **10 tips on how to eat more calcium**
  Reduce your intake of coffee, alcohol and soft drinks.

- **Aging - muscles bones and joints**
Exercise can prevent age-related changes to muscles, bones and joints and can reverse these changes too.

- **Bone density testing**
  
  Most procedures that measure bone density are quick and pain-free.

- **Calcium**
  
  If you don't have enough calcium in your diet, your bones will eventually become weak and brittle.

- **Choosing the right shoe**
  
  The right footwear can help keep your feet healthy, make your physical activity easier and help keep your body safe from injury.

- **Posture**
  
  Bad habits such as slouching and inactivity cause muscle fatigue and tension that ultimately lead to poor posture.

- **Vitamin D**
  
  A balanced approach to sunlight exposure will help you get enough vitamin D while protecting against skin cancer.

- **Vitamin D - maintaining levels in winter (video)**
  
  Vitamin D is important for healthy bones, muscles and the nervous system.

### Bone and bone marrow conditions

- **Acromegaly**
  
  Acromegaly is caused by an excess of growth hormone in adults, which causes the overgrowth of bones in the face, hands, feet and internal organs.

- **Amyloidosis**
  
  A person with amyloidosis produces aggregates of insoluble protein that cannot be eliminated from the body.

- **Bone cancer**
  
  Bone cancer is a rare form of cancer that is treated with chemotherapy, radiotherapy or hormone therapy.

- **Bone fractures**
  
  Common sites for bone fractures include the wrist, ankle and hip.

- **Fibrous dysplasia**
  
  Fibrous dysplasia causes abnormal growth or swelling of bone, but it is not a form of cancer.

- **Leukaemia**
  
  Most children and many adults with acute leukaemia can expect to be cured, while chronic leukaemia can be successfully managed.

- **McCune-Albright syndrome**
  
  The severity of symptoms or how a child with McCune-Albright syndrome will be affected throughout life is difficult to predict.

- **Multiple myeloma**
  
  Multiple myeloma is cancer of plasma cells in the bone marrow.

- **Osteomyelitis**
  
  Osteomyelitis means an infection of bone which can either be recent or longstanding.

- **Paget's disease of bone**
  
  Paget's disease of bone is a chronic condition that causes abnormal enlargement and weakening of bone.

- **Rib injuries**
  
  Rib injuries may include bruises, torn cartilage and bone fractures.

- **Rickets**
  
  Rickets is a preventable childhood bone disease caused by a lack of vitamin D.

- **Scoliosis**
  
  Scoliosis is an abnormal sideways curve of the spine.

- **Shin splints**

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"Shin splints' refers to pain felt anywhere along the shinbone from knee to ankle.

Treacher Collins syndrome
Treacher Collins syndrome is a genetic disorder that affects growth and development of the head, causing facial defects and hearing loss.

Osteoporosis

- Menopause and osteoporosis
  Regular weight-bearing exercise and maintaining a diet rich in calcium from childhood will help reduce bone loss at menopause.

- Osteoporosis
  A healthy, calcium-rich diet and regular physical activity throughout life can help prevent osteoporosis.

- Osteoporosis and exercise
  Exercise can reduce the risk of fractures resulting from osteoporosis by both slowing the rate of bone loss, and reducing the person's risk of falling by building muscle strength and improving balance.

- Osteoporosis in children
  Osteoporosis in children is rare and usually caused by an underlying medical condition.

- Osteoporosis in men
  Up to 30 per cent of all fractures that occur in people with osteoporosis and osteopenia, occur in men.

Muscle conditions

- Bell's palsy
  The majority of people with Bell's palsy, around 90 per cent, will recover completely with time.

- Helping a child with a disability with everyday activities
  If you have a child with a disability you can help improve their communication and movement by encouraging them to take part in daily activities.

- Multiple sclerosis (MS)
  Multiple sclerosis is not contagious, but it is progressive and unpredictable.

- Muscle cramp
  A muscle cramp is an uncontrollable and painful spasm of a muscle.

- Muscular dystrophy
  People affected by muscular dystrophy have different degrees of independence, mobility and carer needs.

- Myasthenia gravis
  Myasthenia gravis is an autoimmune disease that causes muscle weakness.

- Polymyositis
  Polymyositis is hard to diagnose and may be mistaken for muscular dystrophy.

- Spinal muscular atrophy (SMA)
  A child with spinal muscular atrophy type 1 rarely lives beyond three years of age.

- Sprains and strains
  It is important to get the correct treatment for a sprain or strain as soon as possible after the injury to help you recover quickly.

Joint conditions

- Ankle sprains
  Ankle sprain is a common sports injuries caused by overstretching and tearing the supporting ligaments.

- Ankylosing spondylitis
  Ankylosing spondylitis (AS) is a type of inflammatory arthritis that targets the joints of the spine.

- Arthritis explained
  People can manage their arthritis using medication, physiotherapy, exercise and self-management techniques.

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• Baker's cyst
Baker's cysts of the knee don't always require active treatment and sometimes will only require observation by the treating doctor.

• Bursitis
Bursitis is often caused by overuse and the inflammation will continue unless the particular activity or movement is stopped.

• Carpal tunnel syndrome
Carpal tunnel syndrome can be caused by repetitive hand movements, pregnancy and arthritis.

• Developmental dysplasia of the hip (DDH)
Around 95 per cent of babies born with developmental dysplasia of the hip can be successfully treated.

• Elbow pain
Elbow pain can result from overuse in a range of sports or occupations.

• Hip disorders
The hip joint is complicated to allow a wide range of motion while still supporting the weight of the body.

• Knee injuries
Mild knee injuries may heal by themselves, but all injuries should be checked and diagnosed by a doctor or physiotherapist.

• Osgood-Schlatter syndrome
Osgood-Schlatter syndrome is a painful knee condition that affects adolescents.

• Perthes’ disease
Most children with Perthes’ disease eventually recover, but it can take anywhere from two to five years.

• Reactive arthritis
Reactive arthritis is a form of arthritis that occurs as a result of some bacterial infection.

Hand and foot conditions

• Children's feet and shoes
A child learning to walk receives important sensory information from the soles of their feet, and shoes can make walking more difficult.

• Choosing the right shoe
The right footwear can help keep your feet healthy, make your physical activity easier and help keep your body safe from injury.

• Cysts - ganglion cysts
A ganglion cyst is the most common lump on the hand, and tends to target women between the ages of 20 and 40 years of age.

• Diabetes - foot care
Good foot care and regular check-ups can help people with diabetes avoid foot problems.

• Dupuytren's contracture
Dupuytren's contracture gradually causes clawing of the fingers as they are pulled towards the palm.

• Feet - problems and treatments
Correctly fitted shoes help you avoid foot and leg pain or injury.

• Foot care - podiatrists
Podiatrists can advise about how to choose the right shoes for your feet.

• Foot odour - causes and cures
Even the most fastidiously clean people can suffer from foot odour.

• Foot orthoses
People who have chronic foot or leg problems that interfere with their health may be prescribed orthoses by their podiatrist.

• Foot problems - heel pain
The heel protects the structures of the foot, but heel pain is a common foot complaint.
• **Footwear for healthy feet**
  Wearing shoes that fit properly and support your feet is vital to avoid sore feet and to prevent or alleviate many common foot problems.

• **Left-handedness**
  If your child is naturally left-handed, don’t try to force them to use their right hand.

• **Raynaud’s phenomenon**
  Raynaud’s phenomenon can be a sign of a more serious underlying condition, so see your doctor if you experience it.

• **Sever’s disease**
  Sever’s disease is a common cause of heel pain, particularly in the young and physically active.

**Back neck and spine conditions**

• **Back pain**
  Back pain is common. Some people will develop back pain that is persistent (lasts more than three months). There are many things that you can do to live well with back pain.

• **Back pain – disc problems**
  Most disc problems resolve without specific treatment.

• **Back pain in children**
  Children with back pain may grow into adults with chronic bad backs, so it is important to encourage sensible back care.

• **Living with persistent pain**
  Pain is our built-in alarm system. It makes us aware that something might be going wrong in our body. However, there are many things you can do to deal effectively with persistent pain.

• **Neck pain**
  Treatments like physiotherapy, osteopathy or remedial massage can generally help neck and shoulder pain.

• **Scoliosis**
  Scoliosis is an abnormal sideways curve of the spine.

• **Shoulder pain**
  Shoulder pain is common in our community. The good news is that with appropriate treatment pain will improve so you can get back to doing the things you enjoy.

• **Tendonitis**
  Most cases of tendonitis recover completely, but severe untreated tendonitis can lead to rupture of the tendon.

• **Treating persistent pain**
  Pain is our built-in alarm system. It makes us aware that something might be going wrong in our body. However, there are many things you can do to deal effectively with persistent pain.

• **When do I need to see my doctor about persistent pain?**
  Living with persistent pain isn’t easy. Your doctor can help you balance your pain, your treatment and hurdles you encounter in life.

**Related Information**

• **Arthritis**
  Arthritis occurs when joints or muscles become painful, stiff and swollen. Exercise, medication and supportive therapies can help manage symptoms.

• **Elbow pain**
  Elbow pain and can result from overuse in a range of sports or occupations.

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