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.

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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More information

Children (4-12)

The following content is displayed as Tabs. Once you have activated a link navigate to the end of the list to view its associated content. The activated link is defined as Active Tab

- Children basics
- Growth and development
- Behaviour and learning
- Healthy eating
- Keeping active
- Managing weight
- Care and wellbeing
- Identity and relationships
- Health conditions and complaints
- Safety
- Grief and trauma

Children basics

- Childhood immunisation
  Being immunised from an early age helps protect your child against serious childhood infections...
- Children and health services
  There is a range of subsidised and free health services, including services for mental health and dental health, available for children in Victoria...
- Children – keeping them active
  A young child is naturally active, so build upon their inclinations to use their body...
- Eating tips for school children
  Snacks are an important part of a healthy diet for active children, so offer nutritious as well as high energy snacks...
Growth charts for children

Babies and young children do not usually grow in a perfectly smooth way, but instead grow in ‘bursts’.

Immunisation – deciding which vaccines you need

Everyone's immunisation needs are different and are influenced by your health, lifestyle, age and occupation.

Parenting services

Parenting is one of the most important tasks we undertake but it doesn't always come naturally...

Growth and development

- Child development (7) - three to four years
  Your child is starting to understand social skills like sharing and being kind, but they can only practise these skills for a short time while feeling safe and happy.

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

- Dyslexia
  Dyslexia is a type of specific learning difficulty (SLD) in which the person has difficulties with language and words.

- Growing pains
  Growing pains may cause a lot of pain but they are harmless and can respond to simple treatments.

- Growth and development - primary school children
  Always see your doctor if you are concerned about your child's growth or weight.

- Growth charts for children
  Babies and young children do not usually grow in a perfectly smooth way, but instead grow in 'bursts'.

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

- Immunisation history statements for children
  By law, parents or guardians must provide an Immunisation History Statement when enrolling children in any childcare service, kindergarten or primary school in Victoria.

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

- Puberty
  Adjusting to the many changes that happen around puberty can be difficult for both parents and young people.

- Teeth development in children
  Teething symptoms are common in children and can be managed without medications.

Behaviour and learning

- 10 tips for managing sibling rivalry
  Teach your children to sort out minor differences themselves.

- 10 tips to prepare your child for high school
  Visit the school before the school year starts.

- 10 tips to raise an optimistic child
  Be a positive role model.

- A Healthy Start to School
  A Healthy Start to School – a guide for parents of children in their foundation year of school.

- Anxiety and fear in children

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You can help your child overcome anxiety by taking their fears seriously and encouraging them to talk about their feelings...

- Bullying
  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...

- Children and sibling rivalry
  Sibling rivalry is a common problem, particularly among children who are the same sex and close together in age...

- Conduct disorder
  Children with untreated conduct disorder are at increased risk of problems including substance use, personality disorders and mental illnesses...

- Cyberbullying (online bullying)
  Cyberbullying (or online bullying) happens when technology is used to bully someone...

- Discipline and children
  Disciplining your child means teaching them responsible behaviour and self-control...

- Expressive language disorder
  Expressive language disorder means that a child has difficulty with verbal, written or other information...

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

- Oppositional defiant disorder (ODD)
  Oppositional defiant disorder is a childhood behavioural problem characterised by constant disobedience and hostility...

- Peer pressure
  Peer groups can be a very positive influence on your teenager's life...

- Receptive language disorder
  Receptive language disorder means the child has difficulties with understanding what is said to them...

- Sleep - children and nightmares
  Your child may have only a few scary dreams a year, or be troubled by nightmares much more often...

- Young children and communication
  Children thrive with words of encouragement and praise...

Healthy eating

- Body image and diets
  Some people diet because they have a poor body image, not because they want to be a healthy weight...

- Breakfast
  Children who skip breakfast may lack sufficient vitamins and minerals including iron, calcium, zinc and vitamin B2...

- Childcare and healthy eating
  Childcare centres should provide healthy meals for your children...

- Children's diet - fruit and vegetables
  If you eat and enjoy fruit and vegetables every day, your child may eventually follow your lead...

- Eating tips for preschoolers
  Children are able to decide how much food they need for activity and growth if allowed to eat according to their appetite...

- Eating tips for school children
Snacks are an important part of a healthy diet for active children, so offer nutritious as well as high energy snacks...

- Food for sport - tucker talk tips
  Carbohydrate is the most important nutrient for athletes...

- Healthy eating - school lunches
  Simple ways to make your child's school lunch healthier...

- Healthy eating tips
  A good balance between exercise and food intake is important to maintain a healthy body weight...

- Lunch boxes - healthy ideas
  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...

- Sticking to New Year's resolutions
  New Year's resolutions and how to stick to them...

- Vegetarian diets and children
  Children can eat a vegetarian diet and stay healthy as long as their extra nutritional needs are met...

Keeping active

- Children – keeping them active
  A young child is naturally active, so build upon their inclinations to use their body...

- Food for sport - tucker talk tips
  Carbohydrate is the most important nutrient for athletes...

- Gardening for children
  Children can learn new skills, have fun and develop self-confidence when they grow their own plants...

- Healthy active Koori kids - tucker talk tips
  Good nutrition and physical exercise help to keep Koori kids healthy and avoid diseases when they get older...

- Parent's guide for active girls
  Physical activity is an important part of health and wellbeing, and girls should remain active as they grow up...

- Sport and children
  Make sure that some family outings offer opportunities for physical activity, such as playing sport together...

- Sticking to New Year's resolutions
  New Year's resolutions and how to stick to them...

Managing weight

- Body mass index (BMI)
Body mass index or BMI is an approximate measure of your total body fat.

- Eating tips for school children
  Snacks are an important part of a healthy diet for active children, so offer nutritious as well as high energy snacks.

- Growth charts for children
  Babies and young children do not usually grow in a perfectly smooth way, but instead grow in 'bursts'.

- Obesity in children - causes
  Once children are overweight, it takes a lot of effort for them to return to a healthy weight.

- Obesity in children - management
  If your child is overweight, you can help by making healthier lifestyle choices for yourself.

- Overweight children - healthy lifestyle tips
  You can help your child to develop healthy patterns for life and avoid obesity.

- Parent's guide for active girls
  Physical activity is an important part of health and wellbeing, and girls should remain active as they grow up.

Care and wellbeing

- A Healthy Start to School
  A Healthy Start to School – a guide for parents of children in their foundation year of school.

- A Healthy Start to School
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- Childhood immunisation
  Being immunised from an early age helps protect your child against serious childhood infections.

- Children and health services
  There is a range of subsidised and free health services, including services for mental health and dental health, available for children in Victoria.

- Child safety in the car
  Taking care to restrain children correctly while travelling in a car is the best way to prevent injuries.

- Cyberbullying (online bullying)
  Cyberbullying (or online bullying) happens when technology is used to bully someone.

- Dental checks for young children
  Children should have an oral health check by the time they turn two.

- Immunisation history statements for children
  By law, parents or guardians must provide an Immunisation History Statement when enrolling children in any childcare service, kindergarten or primary school in Victoria.

- Immunisation in secondary schools
  Some immunisations are recommended for all Australian teenagers.

- Pain management (acute) - children
  If you think your child is in pain, always see your doctor for diagnosis and treatment.

Identity and relationships

- 10 tips for managing sibling rivalry
  Teach your children to sort out minor differences themselves. 10 tips for managing sibling rivalry.

- A Healthy Start to School
  A Healthy Start to School – a guide for parents of children in their foundation year of school.

- A Healthy Start to School
  A Healthy Start to School – a guide for parents of children in their foundation year of school.
Body image and diets
Some people diet because they have a poor body image, not because they want to be a healthy weight.

Body image and young people - staying positive (video)
The pressure on young girls and boys to be physically perfect is creating an epidemic of children and teenagers with low self-esteem and negative body image. Reporter Flip Shelton introduces us to the...

Body image – tips for parents
Give your child opportunities to appreciate their body for what it can do, rather than what it looks like.

Bullying
Parents can help with bullying by supporting their child and involving the authorities to find solutions.

Children and shyness
If your child's shyness is especially debilitating, you may like to consider professional help from a counsellor or psychologist.

Children and sibling rivalry
Sibling rivalry is a common problem, particularly among children who are the same sex and close together in age.

Family violence and children
Children exposed to domestic violence are more likely to experience emotional and behavioural problems.

Peer pressure
Peer groups can be a very positive influence on your teenager's life.

Health conditions and complaints

Asthma explained
Asthma cannot be cured, but with good management people with asthma can lead normal, active lives.

Asthma in childhood - triggers (video)
Parents and children talk about some of the factors that can cause a child's asthma to flare up.

Asthma in children
Understanding asthma triggers for your child can help to reduce the risk of an asthma attack.

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.

Bedwetting
Bedwetting is a problem for many children and punishing them for it will only add to their distress.

Children and vomiting
Mild vomiting is normal in most babies and improves over time.

Constipation and children
A healthy diet, plenty of fluids, exercise and regular toilet habits can help relieve constipation in children.

Diabetes - issues for children and teenagers
Many parents worry when their child with diabetes starts or returns to school.

Fever - children
Fever is a way in which the body fights infection. A fever is not dangerous and does not always indicate a serious illness.

Gastroenteritis in children
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...

Head lice (nits)
No product can prevent head lice, but regular checks can help prevent the spread.

Immunisation history statements for children
By law, parents or guardians must provide an Immunisation History Statement when enrolling children in any childcare service, kindergarten or primary school in Victoria.

- **Obesity in children - management**

  If your child is overweight, you can help by making healthier lifestyle choices for yourself.

- **Pinworms**

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

**Safety**

- **Animals and child safety**

  Children should always be closely supervised near animals and taught how to behave safely around pets.

- **Bicycle safety and children**

  As they grow and develop, and with the help of adults, children become increasingly aware of how they can manage their own safety and become safer road and bicycle users.

- **Burns and scalds - children**

  Most hot tap water scald injuries to children happen in the bathroom.

- **Child safety and injury prevention**

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

- **Child safety – at home**

  The best way to reduce the risk of injury to children is to remove a potentially dangerous item or add a safety product.

- **Child safety in the car**

  Taking care to restrain children correctly while travelling in a car is the best way to prevent injuries.

- **Cyberbullying (online bullying)**

  Cyberbullying (or online bullying) happens when technology is used to bully someone.

- **Farm safety – children**

  Children who live on farms are at greater risk of injury and death than their parents or other farm workers.

- **Hot weather and child safety**

  Babies and children can quickly lose body fluids in hot weather, which can lead to dehydration.

- **Internet safety for children**

  A child’s digital footprint can be as easy to follow as their real footprints.

- **Mobile phone safety for children**

  Teach your child strategies for responding to mobile phone bullying.

- **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**

  As they grow and develop, and with the help of adults, children become increasingly aware of how they can manage their own safety, and become safer road users.

- **Scooters and child safety**

  Scooters can travel at fast speeds and falls and collisions are disturbingly common.

- **Water safety for children**

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

**Grief and trauma**

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Child Protection Service

Child Protection provides child-centred, family-focused services to protect children from harm caused by abuse within the family.

Cyberbullying (online bullying)

Cyberbullying (or online bullying) happens when technology is used to bully someone.

Grief and children

It can be difficult to talk to a child about death, but it is important to be honest with them.

Grief – support services

People who have support from family and friends are less likely to suffer poor health after bereavement and loss.

Recent arrivals, asylum seekers and family support services

Provides an overview of family support programs and health services available to refugees and asylum seekers living in Victoria.

Trauma and children - two to five years

Preschoolers may not have the words but will show their distress at traumatic events through changes in behaviour and functioning.

Trauma and primary school age children

Children look to their parents or carers to judge how to deal with a crisis.

Trauma and teenagers - tips for parents

Teenagers may turn to friends rather than parents for support in times of trauma and distress.

Related Information

- No Jab No Play
  
  No Jab No Play – from 1 January 2016, all parents/guardians seeking to enrol their child at an early childhood service in Victoria must provide evidence that the child is fully immunised for their age.

- A Healthy Start to School
  
  A Healthy Start to School – a guide for parents of children in their foundation year of school.

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- Asthma explained
  
  Asthma cannot be cured, but with good management people with asthma can lead normal, active lives.

- 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.

Home

Related information on other websites

- Child and Youth Health.
- Growing pains – KidsHealth

Content Partner

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