
When Your Child Has “Growing Pains”

Your child has been waking up in the middle of the night with leg pain. These “growing pains” are common and normal in children. They typically occur in children between the ages of 3 and 5 and again just before adolescence, around the age of 8 to 12. There are things you can do to help your child feel better when they have growing pains.

What are the symptoms of growing pains?

Growing pains are felt in one or both legs, most commonly at night. The pain might feel like tightness or an ache in the muscles of the thighs or calves. The pain can last from a few minutes to several hours and disappears by morning.

What causes growing pains?

The specific cause of growing pains is not known. One thought is that physical activity can make muscles tired and more likely to cramp or ache.

How are growing pains diagnosed?

Growing pains are usually easy to diagnose. Your child’s healthcare provider will examine your child. They will also ask about your child’s symptoms and overall health.

How are growing pains treated?

You can help your child feel better by trying these tips:

- **Massage.** Gently rub your child’s leg where the muscle hurts.
- **Apply a heating pad or pack.** Place a warm, not hot, heating pad under the painful area until your child’s leg feels better.
- **Give ibuprofen or acetaminophen.** You can give your child this over-the-counter medicine. It can help relax the painful muscle so your child can fall back asleep.
- **Keep up fluids.** Make sure your child always has water available to drink during the day.

When to call your child's healthcare provider

Call your child's healthcare provide right away if any of the following occur:

- Knee, ankle, or elbow pain (pain in joints) or swelling of a joint
- Discomfort that lasts into the morning, such as pain, limping, or stiffness
- Pain at night in parts of the body other than the legs
- Pain in exactly the same spot every time
- Leg pain that happens during the day