

## What are growing pains?

The term *growing pains* may really be a misnomer. Many experts believe that growth in children occurs at such a slow rate that it is unlikely to cause pain.

In fact, the aches of growing pains usually do not occur during periods of peak growth, which are the first 3 years of life and between the ages of 12 and 15; the pains are most common in children aged 4-8 years. The aches seen with growing pains usually only involve the legs.

Growth, however, does occur in spurts and can be concentrated in the knee area, so growth as a cause has not been ruled out. Other theories include overexertion, fatigue, and a chemical imbalance, but the true cause is still a mystery. Some experts have suggested that the pain is nothing more than a means of getting attention. But if a child only experiences the pain during the night and wakes from a sound sleep, this is probably not the case.

### How many children are affected?

It is difficult to know how many children have growing pains since many never see a doctor for this reason and since there is no sure way to diagnose the condition. Some speculate that it affects nearly all children, but that not all children complain of the aches or seek help. Experts seem to agree that growing pains are more common among girls than boys, with somewhere around 18% of girls and 13% of boys seeking help for the problem.

### Does your child have growing pains?

Usually, the child will report pain in the thighs, calves, backs of the knees, or occasionally the groin area. The pain is almost always on both sides of the body. The pain may occur once per night for a number of nights per week for perhaps for a few weeks. After occurring sporadically, the aches may disappear for weeks or months before recurring or they may never recur at all.

The pain generally assumes a crampy quality and often surprises people with its intensity. Children, even those who are usually noncomplainers, may wake screaming and in tears.



The pain almost never lasts any longer than 10-20 minutes, however. For this reason, you need not give acetaminophen (Tylenol) or other pain relievers; the pain will almost always subside before the drug has a chance to take effect. Gentle massage of the affected area or use of a heating pad may help to ease the discomfort.

Growing pains do not usually occur during the day, do not occur every single night, and cause no physical limitations. Children will not limp, refrain from normal activities, or have limited movement. If they do; if they have any other symptoms, such as fever, general fatigue, rash, swollen or tender joints, or conjunctivitis; or if their attitude is significantly different lately, they should be examined by a physician.

Though the condition may be troubling to children and parents alike, it is harmless and will subside on its own. The physician may wish to order a few basic screening tests, however, just to eliminate the possibility of anything more serious.