

Growing pains



Does your child complain of aching legs in the evening or around bedtime? Are they waking in the night complaining of pain? 'Growing pains' aren't a myth, nor are they imagined. According to a South Australian study close to 37% of children suffer from growing pains, which take the form of aches and cramps in the muscles of the lower legs. Growing pains usually strike in the main growth spurt periods between the ages of 3–5 and 8–14 and are usually in the front of the thigh, the calf muscle, or at the back of the knee. Your child will have no joint pain and will otherwise seem perfectly healthy.

If you notice that your child gets cramps or pain after a busy day of running around, chances are that this is the result of overuse of a particular group of muscles, and tired muscles will then be a bit painful later in the evening. Growing pains often run in the family, and can also be the result of flat footedness and other foot conditions that force your child's muscles to work extra hard. These issues can be treated and it's important to get to the root of the problem early before other problems develop.

Pain in the legs and feet can be the cause of a range of podiatric conditions, some more serious than others. Growing pains have vague symptoms and are usually diagnosed by ruling everything else out! Signs of growing pains include pain in both legs in the afternoon or evening and during the night that is gone by morning. Growing pains usually occur for a few nights in a row and with a gap of a few months in between episodes. If your child has pain in only one leg or pain that is still there or worse in the morning then this could be the result of a more serious condition. In both cases, you should book an appointment with your podiatrist, who will perform a thorough exam in a friendly environment to check for symptoms of swelling, tenderness, infection or limited range of movement, all of which could be indicators for other foot problems.

Growing pains shouldn't be ignored and can be treated to provide your child with some relief. Stretching exercises can be really effective to ease pain and your podiatrist can give you some advice and instructions on how best to help your child when an episode strikes. For some children, orthotics can be really helpful to ease and prevent growing pains. As orthotics are custom fit into your child's shoes, they provide extra cushioning and support to help ease muscles that might otherwise be working overtime in active young people.

Child's Play

Children are naturally active beings. Their young bodies are still exploring what they are capable of and they are full of energy to jump, hop, skip and run around all day long. If your child is having trouble keeping up with the other kids or is regularly falling over for no apparent reason, they might be suffering from foot problems that, when treated, can be resolved to get them out there and as active as they want to be.

Kids have many of the same problems with their feet as adults, but these problems can be made worse by the fact of their active lifestyles and rapidly growing bodies, that are constantly adjusting to changing conditions. The main foot problems affecting kids are ingrown toenails, flat footedness, warts and heel pain.

Ingrown toenails

Ingrown toenails occur when nail grows into the skin beside it, causing infection and pain that will slow your child down. Ingrown toenails can be present at birth and are common in growing feet, particularly as shoes become too tight when they're ready to go up a size. We can easily treat ingrown toenails either in the clinic, or with minor surgery if needed.

Flat feet

Flat feet are the result of flattened or collapsed arches and can make walking and running difficult, especially if your child is also experiencing pain in their arches or other parts of the feet that are working harder than usual to help support movement. They are a common problem in children and can be caused by growth changes as much as by other causes. Some children will develop higher arches as they grow and orthotics or arch supports can be specially fitted to your child's shoes to promote arch support and development.

Warts

Kids are tough on their feet and warts are an unsightly and painful side effect that might stop them in their tracks for a few days. Warts are a virus and look like a thick patch of skin with small black dots. They usually pop up on the sole of the foot, which is why they can be quite painful when your child wants to run around. The best way to avoid warts is to encourage your child to wear shoes around swimming pools and other areas where feet can come into contact with viruses and bacteria from other bare feet. Warts are easily treated, usually by freezing the wart to remove it.

Heel pain

In teens, pain around the heels can be a sign of Sever's disease, a condition caused by the Achilles tendon placing extra strain on the heel bone and swelling in the around the heel. Unlike the usual growing pains that only cause discomfort at night (see our accompanying article, 'Growing pains'), heel pain can flare up during physical activity, forcing your child to the sidelines of the footie game and even changing their walking style as they compensate for the pain. Sever's disease will ultimately heal itself as the growth plate around the heel bone fully develops and the bones fuse by the age of 15, but can cause quite a bit of pain in the meantime and has the potential to lead to other damaging foot problems through changed walking patterns as your child attempts to ease the pain. Early treatment can relieve symptoms to get your kid back on the playing field faster.



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