

Argus Orthopaedic Zone

What Is "Growing Pains"?

By Thomas J. Haverbush, M.D.
Orthopaedic Surgeon

Transforming patient information into patient understanding.

What Is It?

Many people scoff at the term "growing pains" and dismiss it as a myth.

However, parents whose children have experienced severe unexplained leg pain will tell you growing pains are a real entity.

Let me say the origin of leg pain remains a mystery. I believe that the pain is related to muscle stress from over activity such as running, jumping, climbing, etc. A particularly active day can lead to aching in the legs at night.

The term is a misnomer in that there is no evidence that it has anything to do with growing bones. It is more common in boys than girls. Ages most affected are children 2 - 5 and in the 8 - 12 year age range.

Signs and Symptoms

- Child complains of pain in late afternoon or evening.
- There is no visible sign of injury.
- Child wakes up at night crying.
- Pain is in the calf, thigh or knee. Rarely in the foot or ankle.
- Pain usually in both legs.
- One leg may hurt more than the other.
- Pain can be in different legs on different nights.
- Pain does not occur daily.

Treatment

- Massage the legs. It helps and doesn't hurt the child.
- Try hot or cold compresses.

- Children's doses of Motrin or Advil.
- If an actual injury has occurred, the leg will hurt when touched.

Get Help (Key Points)

- If the leg is painful when touched
- If the child is limping
- If a fever is present
- If the child looks "sick"
- If part of the leg is swollen, red or persistently painful

What Else?

Children and teens often experience discomfort with athletic activity. Their bones and muscles are growing and their level of physical activity may increase with their interest in sports. So some aches and pains are expected.

Key Point: Parents please listen to this. Your children aren't reading this. It's up to you.

Other conditions can be present that need prompt treatment. If any doubt you must have it checked or you could be missing something big and important. I am treating these things all the time in the office and hospital. I know what I am talking about. Have me or someone check it if you have any doubt.

Office Website and Argus Orthopaedic Zone Archive

Don't forget to check out the entirely new office website, www.orthopodsurgeon.com, Your Orthopaedic Connection and the Argus Orthopaedic Zone Archive of all back articles. It is a wealth of information about all the things I treat in the office and hospital.

Our goal is simple - To help people return to more pain free, functional lives. I specialize in you.

Good health. Good life. All the best to you.

Be well.

Dr. Haverbush