

Q: My son often complains that his legs hurt. Could this be growing pains?

A:

Growing pains are a frequent complaint in children ages two through 12. Surprisingly, they are especially prevalent in girls. Growing pains are usually felt in the front of the thighs or calves but may occur in other areas of the body as well. The pain typically strikes in the late afternoon or evening and may be severe enough to wake a child from sleep during the night.

Rapid growth that is uneven between muscles, bones, joints and ligaments can be a source of growing pains. Running, climbing and playing can result in overuse and fatigue of the musculoskeletal system, possibly causing growing pains as well.

Growing pains can be treated at home with stretching exercises and gentle massage of the muscles surrounding the area of pain. Heat from either a heating pad or warm bath can also provide relief. Ibuprofen or acetaminophen can be taken to provide additional pain relief.

Growing pains are not often cause for alarm, but you should consult your child's doctor if:

- Pain is persistent
- Pain is present in the morning
- The pain interferes with normal activities
- Pain is located in the joints
- Pain is associated with an injury
- Pain is accompanied by swelling, redness, fever, limping, fatigue or loss of appetite.

Growing pains can come and go but flare-ups normally subside on their own by morning. Rarely do growing pains continue beyond the teen years so you can encourage your child by reminding them that they won't last forever.

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