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Health A-Z (Link: www.nhs.uk/conditions/) NHS services (Link: www.nhs.uk/nhs-services/) Live Well (Link: www.nhs.uk/live-well/) Ment

Limping in children

Limping in children is not usually serious and could be caused by something minor like a sprain or strain. But you should see a GP if it's not obvious what's causing it.

Causes of limping in children

Limping in children is often caused by an obvious injury to the leg or foot, such as:

- a sprain or strain (Link: www.nhs.uk/conditions/sprains-and-strains/)
- a blister (Link: www.nhs.uk/conditions/blisters/), cut or bruise
- a broken bone (Link: www.nhs.uk/common-health-questions/accidents-first-aid-and-treatments/how-do-i-know-if-i-have-broken-a-bone/)

Sometimes it may not be clear what's causing your child to limp. The symptoms might give you an idea of what the cause might be.

But do not self-diagnose – a limp with no obvious cause should always be checked by a GP as it could be a sign of something serious.

Other symptoms	Possible cause
Sudden pain in the hip, knee or thigh, sometimes after a viral infection	Irritable hip (Link: www.nhs.uk/conditions/hip-pain-children-irritable-hip/)
Pain in the groin, hip or knee, stiff hip, foot or leg turns inward	Slipped upper femoral epiphysis
Painful, swollen joints that lasts for longer than 6 weeks	Different types of juvenile arthritis
Pain in the groin, thigh or knee after exercise, stiff hip	Perthes' disease
A lump on your child's leg, weight loss, pain at night	A cancer, such as leukaemia, sarcoma (Link: www.nhs.uk/conditions/soft-tissue-sarcoma/) or lymphoma

See a GP if:

- your child has a limp and you're not sure what's causing it

Call 999 or go to A&E if:

- your child gets sudden pain in their hip, knee or thigh (hip problems can sometimes be felt in the thigh or knee)
- your child cannot put any weight on their leg
- the leg has changed shape or is pointing at an odd angle
- your child feels generally unwell and has a high temperature or feels hot and shivery
- your child also has severe pain in the lower part of their tummy
- your child's symptoms get worse

Find your nearest A&E (Link: <https://www.nhs.uk/Service-Search/other-services/Accident%20and%20emergency%20services/LocationSearch/428>)

What we mean by severe pain

Severe pain:

- always there and so bad it's hard to think or talk
- you cannot sleep
- it's very hard to move, get out of bed, go to the bathroom, wash or dress

Moderate pain:

- always there
- makes it hard to concentrate or sleep
- you can manage to get up, wash or dress

Mild pain:

- comes and goes
- is annoying but does not stop you doing daily activities

Treatment from a GP

Treatment will depend on what's causing your child to limp. Sometimes it may get better on its own.

A GP will examine your child and may arrange for more tests to find out what's causing your child to limp.

They might:

- give you advice on how to treat a sprain or strain (Link: www.nhs.uk/conditions/sprains-and-strains/) at home, such as rest and taking paracetamol or ibuprofen
- refer you to hospital for an X-ray (Link: www.nhs.uk/conditions/x-ray/) or to a specialist (for example, a paediatric orthopaedic surgeon) to help find the cause

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