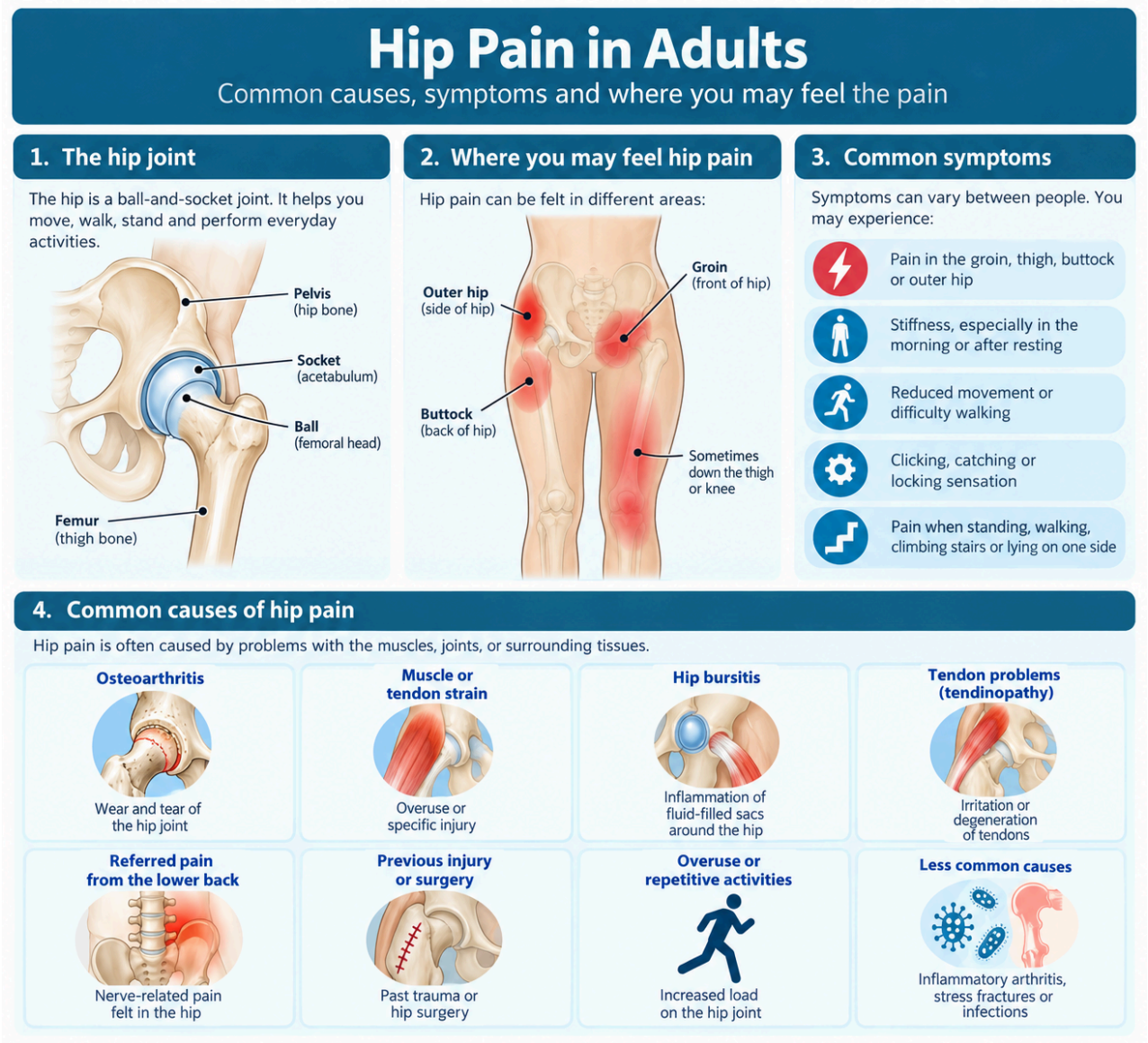
Hip Pain in Adults

Understanding hip pain, common causes and management

Hip Pain in Adults

A guide to symptoms, causes and recovery



What is hip pain?

Hip pain is discomfort felt in or around the hip joint. Pain may be felt in the groin, outer hip, buttock, thigh or knee.

How does it start?

Hip pain can come on suddenly after an injury or develop gradually over time.

Causes and symptoms

Recognising hip pain and when to seek help

Common causes of hip pain

Osteoarthritis (joint wear and tear); muscle or tendon strain; hip bursitis; tendinopathy; referred pain from the lower back; previous injury or surgery; and overuse or repetitive activities.

Less common causes

Inflammatory arthritis, stress fractures or infections.

Symptoms you may experience

Pain in the groin, thigh, buttock or outer hip; stiffness after resting; reduced movement or difficulty walking; clicking, catching or locking; pain with walking, stairs, standing or lying on one side.

When to seek urgent medical help

Sudden severe hip pain after a fall or injury; inability to bear weight; fever, redness or swelling; persistent night pain; unexplained weight loss or worsening pain.

How hip pain may affect everyday activities

Hip pain may make it harder to put on shoes or socks, get in and out of a car, walk longer distances or sleep comfortably on the affected side.

Helpful details to keep track of

Note when symptoms occur, how long they last, any injury or recent change in activity, and what helps. Share these details with your GP or physiotherapist.

Rehabilitation exercises

Gentle hip strengthening and mobility exercises

Hip Pain in Adults – Exercise Examples

Gentle exercises to improve mobility, strength and function

1 Gluteal stretch



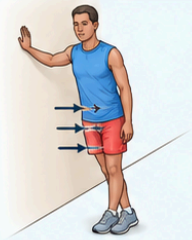
- Lie on your back with knees bent.
- Place one ankle over the opposite knee.
- Gently pull the thigh towards your chest until a stretch is felt in the buttock.
- Hold for 20–30 seconds.
- Repeat 2–3 times each side.

2 Iliotibial band stretch (standing)



- Stand tall and cross one leg in front of the other.
- Gently push the knee across your body until a stretch is felt on the outer hip.
- Hold for 20–30 seconds.
- Repeat 2–3 times each side.

3 Iliotibial band stretch (side-leaning)



- Stand side-on to a wall, cross the leg closest to the wall behind.
- Lean your hips towards the wall until a stretch is felt on the outer hip.
- Hold for 20–30 seconds.
- Repeat 2–3 times each side.

4 Straight leg raise



- Lie on your back with one knee bent.
- Keep the other leg straight.
- Lift the straight leg slowly, keeping the knee straight.
- Hold for 3–5 seconds, then lower.
- Repeat 10–15 times, each leg.

5 Prone hip extension



- Lie on your front with legs straight.
- Keep the knee straight and gently lift one leg off the bed.
- Hold for 3–5 seconds, then lower.
- Repeat 10–15 times, each leg.

6 Side-lying leg lift



- Lie on your side with legs straight and head supported.
- Keep the top leg straight and lift slowly.
- Hold for 3–5 seconds, then lower.
- Repeat 10–15 times, each leg.

7 Wall squat with a ball



- Stand with an exercise ball between your back and a wall.
- Slide down into a small squat, keeping your knees over your feet.
- Hold for 3–5 seconds, then return.
- Repeat 10–15 times.

8 Clam exercise



- Lie on your side with knees bent and feet together.
- Keep your pelvis still and lift the top knee, keeping feet together.
- Hold for 3–5 seconds, then lower.
- Repeat 10–15 times, each side.

Top tips for exercising

Start gently
Begin with comfortable movements and build up gradually.

Listen to your body
Stop if pain or swelling increases. Avoid forcing any movement.

Be consistent
Regular exercise can help reduce pain and improve function.

Seek advice
Ask your physiotherapist which exercises are most suitable for you.

Ask your physiotherapist which exercises are appropriate for you.

Self-management, recovery and further advice

Practical steps to manage hip pain and know when to seek help

Stay active and exercise

Gentle movement reduces stiffness. Avoid prolonged rest and modify activities rather than stopping completely. A physiotherapist may recommend strengthening, stretching, balance or walking exercises.

Pain relief and heat or ice

Paracetamol or anti-inflammatory medicines may help if suitable; ask your GP or pharmacist. Heat can ease stiffness; ice may help pain and inflammation after activity.

Lifestyle advice

Maintain a healthy weight, wear supportive footwear, avoid sudden activity increases and use pillows for support when sleeping.

Physiotherapy and recovery

Most people improve within weeks to months. Physiotherapy can identify the cause, tailor exercises and improve movement, strength and confidence.

Further advice

If pain persists or worsens, speak to your GP or physiotherapist. X-ray or MRI is not always needed and is recommended only in certain situations.

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