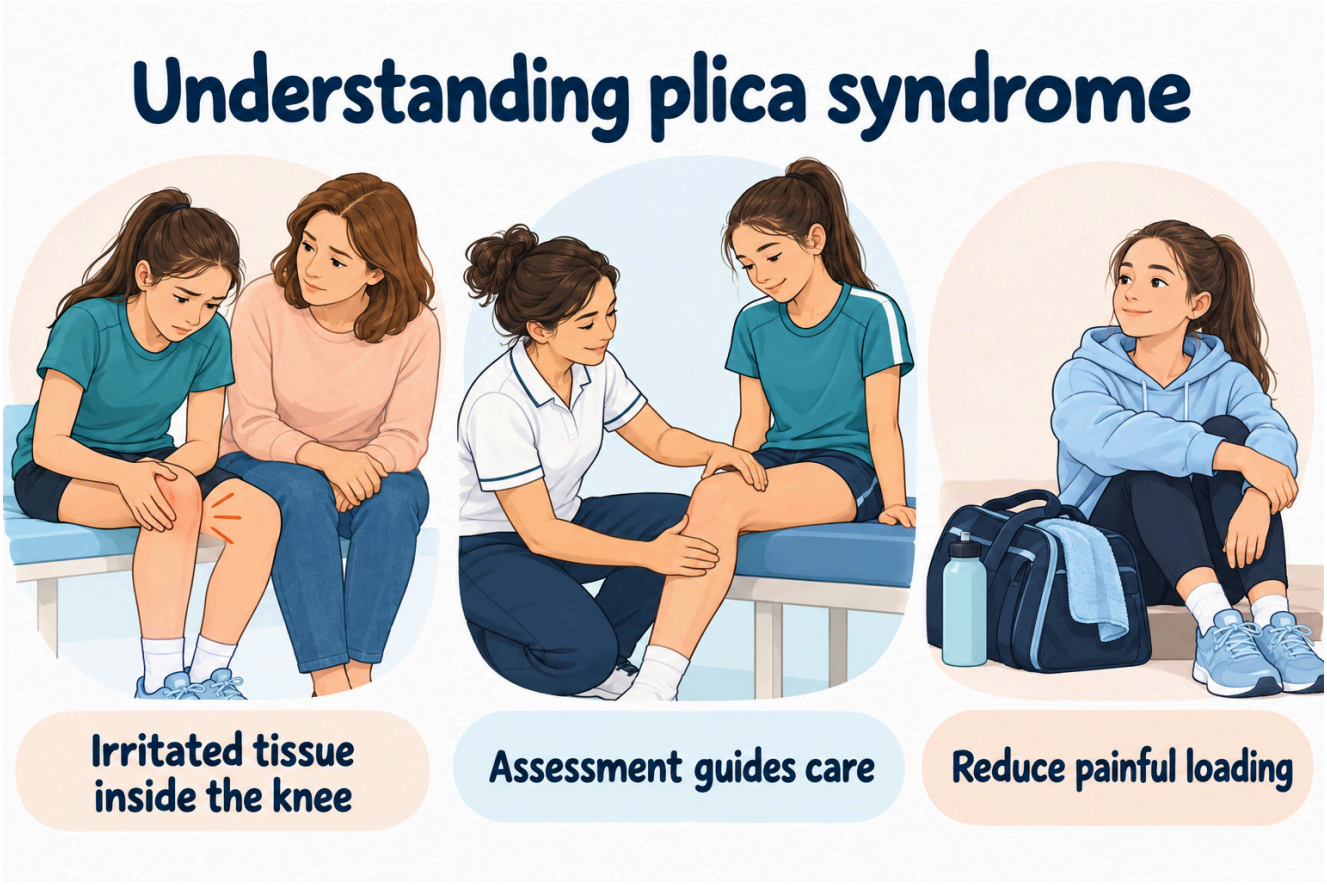
Plica Syndrome

Information for children, parents and carers

Plica Syndrome

A guide to symptoms, treatment and recovery



Understanding the condition

Synovial plicae are normal folds of tissue inside the knee. Plica syndrome occurs when a fold becomes irritated or inflamed, often after overuse, repetitive knee bending or injury.

Supporting your child

Most children recover with activity changes, physiotherapy and a gradual return to sport. Avoid repeatedly provoking painful bending or twisting and use a programme tailored to your symptoms.

Symptoms and assessment

Understanding the cause and when to seek help

Who is affected and why?

Active children and adolescents may develop symptoms with repeated running, jumping or knee bending. Direct impact, previous injury, tight thigh muscles or weak supporting muscles may contribute.

Common symptoms

Pain along the front or inside of the knee, clicking, snapping or popping, stiffness after sitting or activity, and mild swelling or tenderness. Locking or giving way is less common.

What can aggravate symptoms?

Sprinting, jumping, squatting and stairs may worsen pain. Repeated bending or twisting can irritate the tissue. Temporarily reduce the movements that trigger symptoms.

Assessment

A clinician reviews the history and examines the knee. Ultrasound or MRI may help exclude other conditions, including tendon problems, meniscal tears or ligament injuries.

When to seek advice

Arrange review if pain persists despite rest and exercises, clicking or locking becomes frequent, the knee gives way, daily life or sport is affected, or swelling, redness or fever occurs.

Key message

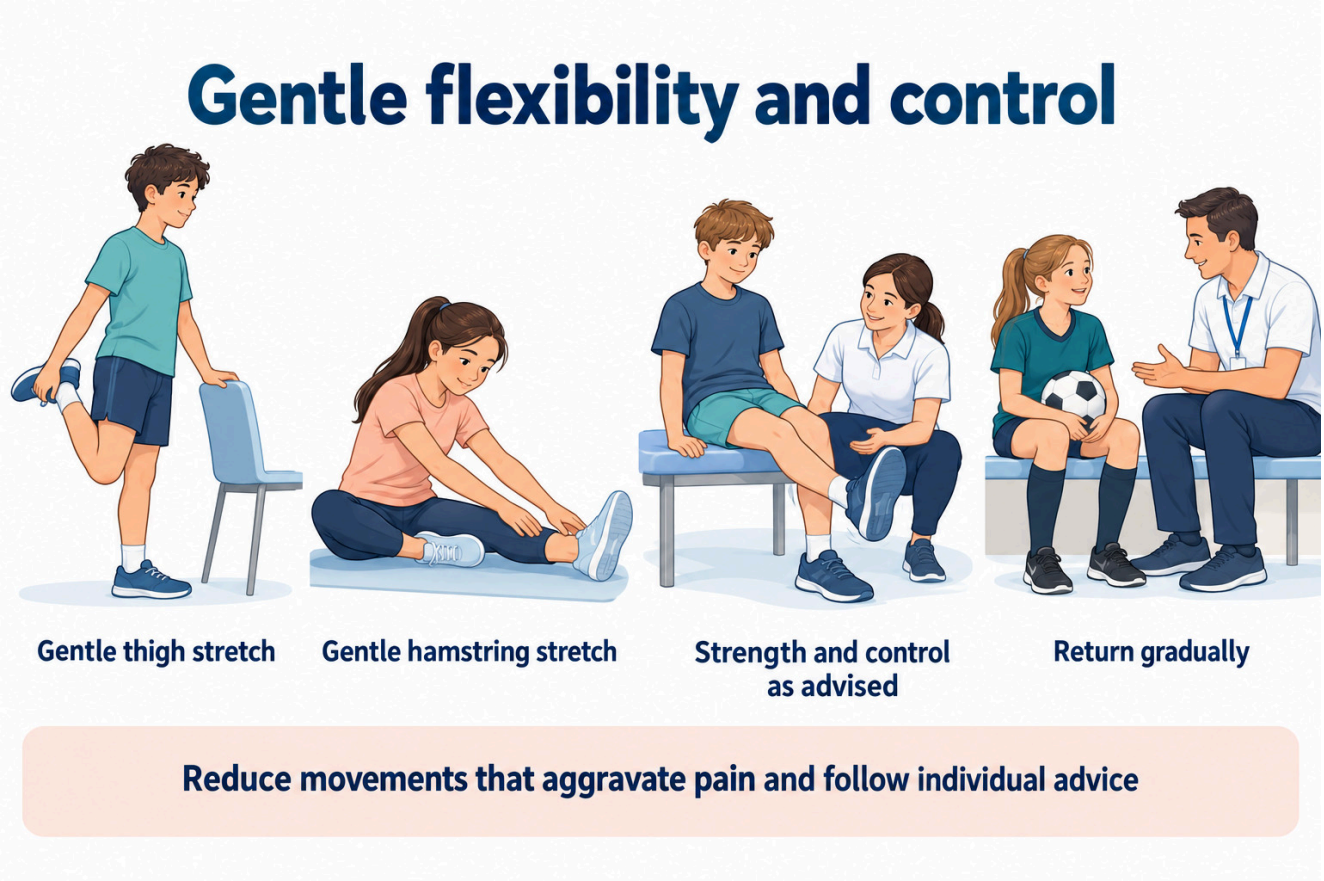
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Exercises and rehabilitation

Activity guided by your child's healthcare team

Before starting activity

Use gentle flexibility and strength exercises chosen by your physiotherapist. Keep movements controlled and reduce or avoid activities that aggravate symptoms.



Activity guidance

Flexibility: prescribed quadriceps, hamstring and calf stretches.
Strength: develop hip, thigh and core support as advised.
Control: practise the knee movement technique taught to you.
Sport: increase activity gradually as symptoms allow.

Important precautions

Do not force stretches or repeatedly bend through pain. Seek review for frequent locking, giving way, worsening pain, swelling, redness or fever.

Treatment and next steps

Caring for your child and finding support

Adjusting activity and comfort

Reduce painful movements; low-impact activity may continue if pain-free. A wrapped cold pack for 10-15 minutes after activity may help. Use age-appropriate pain relief only as advised.

Physiotherapy and other support

Treatment may include flexibility, hip and thigh strengthening, core control and movement retraining. Taping or a knee brace may help selected cases. Surgery is uncommon and considered only for persistent symptoms.

Recovery and prevention

Symptoms often improve over weeks to months. Warm up before sport, maintain comfortable flexibility and strength, and avoid sudden training increases or repetitive knee strain. Return to sport gradually.

Questions or concerns?

Ask for review if pain persists, clicking or locking becomes frequent, the knee gives way, daily activities are limited, or swelling, redness or fever occurs. The clinician can check for another cause and adapt treatment.

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