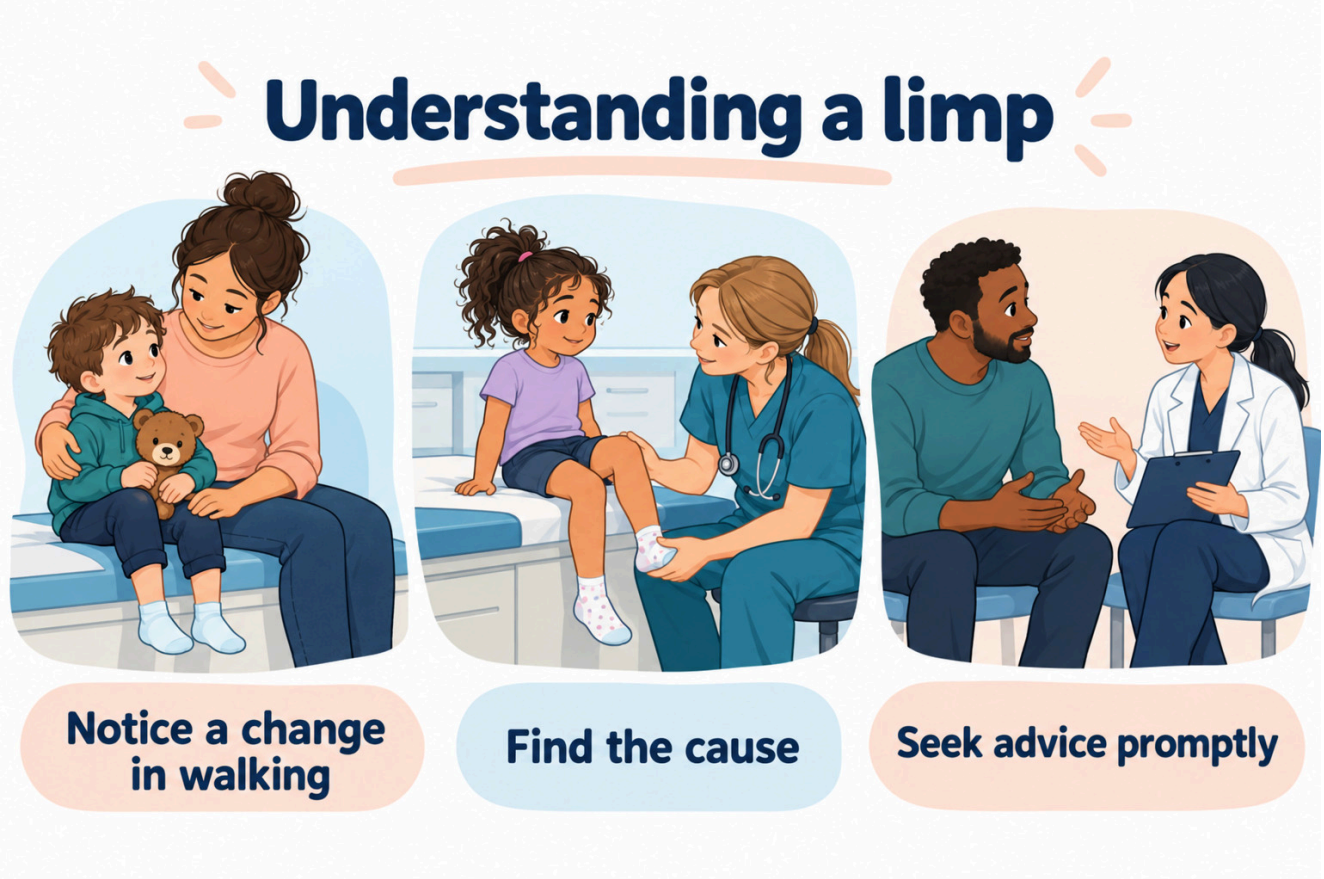
Limping in Children

Information for children, parents and carers

Limping in Children

A guide to symptoms, treatment and recovery



Understanding the condition

A limp is a change from your child's usual walking pattern, often favouring one leg. It can start suddenly or gradually, be subtle or obvious, and occur with or without pain.

Supporting your child

Limping should not be ignored. Many causes are minor, but some need urgent care. Early assessment helps identify the cause and guide safe treatment and activity.

Symptoms and assessment

Understanding the cause and when to seek help

Injury and infection

Sprains, strains, bruises or fractures may follow a fall or accident. Bone or joint infection can cause pain and swelling, often with fever or redness.

Other possible causes

Inflammatory conditions such as juvenile idiopathic arthritis can cause stiffness and pain. Perthes disease or SCFE can affect the hip. Muscle or nerve problems, foot alignment and leg length differences may also change walking.

What happens at assessment?

The clinician asks about symptoms and medical history, examines the hips, knees and feet, and observes standing and walking when appropriate. Imaging or blood tests may be needed.

Urgent warning signs

Seek urgent medical attention for severe pain, inability to walk, a swollen, red or hot joint, fever or feeling unwell, or significant injury. A persistent limp without improvement also needs prompt review.

What to tell the clinician

Describe when the limp began, any fall or injury, where pain is felt, whether your child can walk, and any fever, swelling or change in wellbeing. Mention symptoms even if pain seems mild.

Key message

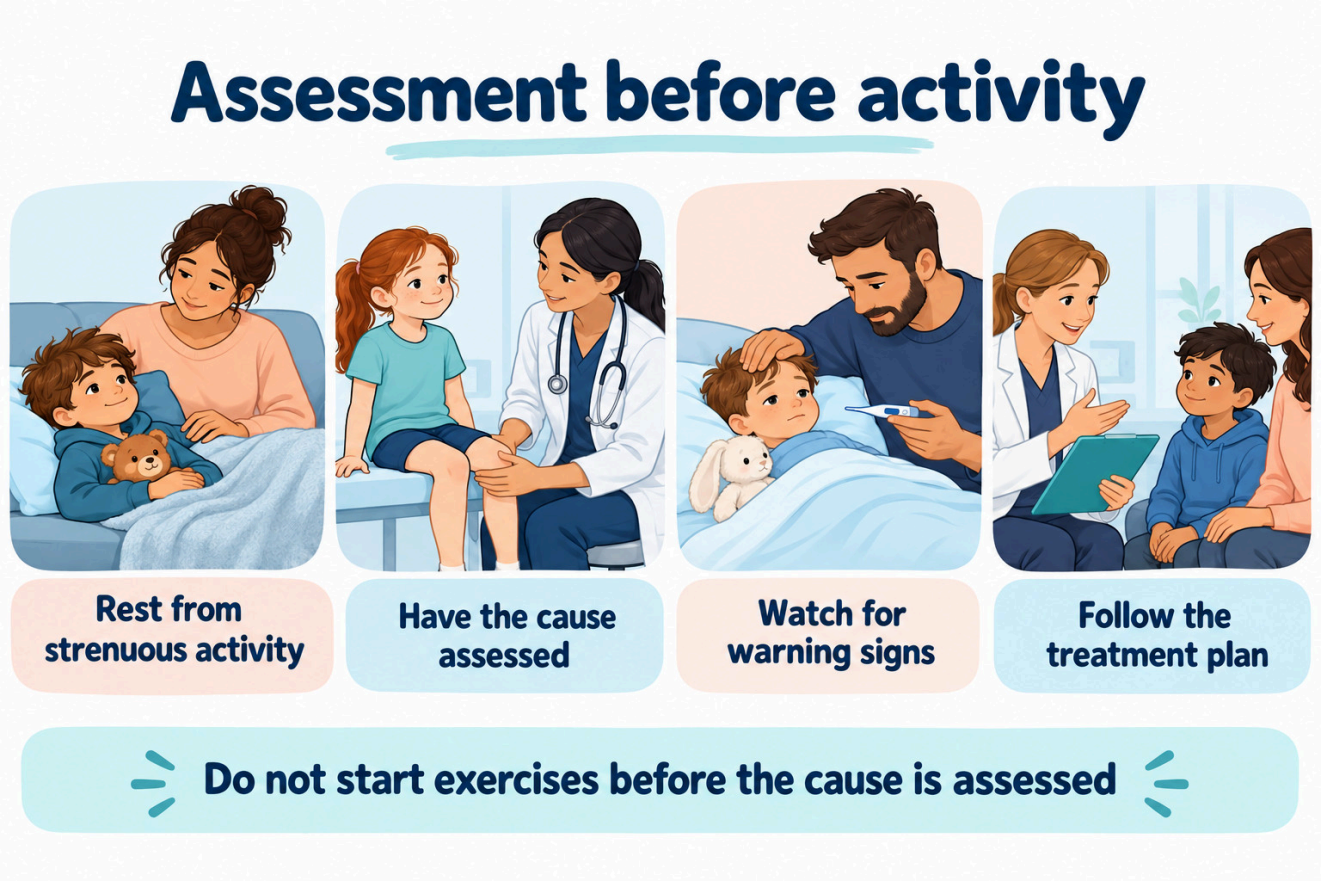
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Treatment and daily care

Activity guided by your child's healthcare team

Before starting activity

There is no single exercise routine for a limp. Have the cause assessed before starting exercises, and follow the healthcare team's activity advice.



Activity guidance

Rest: avoid strenuous activity until reviewed.
Assessment: treatment depends on the underlying cause.
Monitoring: watch pain, swelling, redness, fever and walking.
Recovery: begin rehabilitation only when the clinician advises it.

Important precautions

Get immediate medical attention if your child cannot walk, has a hot, red or swollen joint, develops fever or has severe pain after injury. Do not force walking or exercise.

Treatment and next steps

Caring for your child and finding support

Treatment depends on the cause

Minor injuries may need rest, cold packs, support and pain relief as advised. Infections may require antibiotics or hospital care. Inflammatory conditions may need medicines and physiotherapy.

Further treatment and rehabilitation

Growth-related bone conditions may need monitoring, physiotherapy or surgery. Muscle or neurological problems may need physiotherapy, orthotics or specialist referral. Follow the plan for your child's diagnosis.

Caring for your child at home

Encourage rest from strenuous activity until assessed. Use age-appropriate pain relief only if recommended. Monitor for worsening pain, swelling, redness, fever or inability to bear weight.

Questions or urgent concerns?

Contact your doctor or go to A&E; if your child cannot walk, has a swollen, red or hot joint, fever, or severe pain after injury. Seek prompt review if a limp lasts more than a few days without improvement.

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