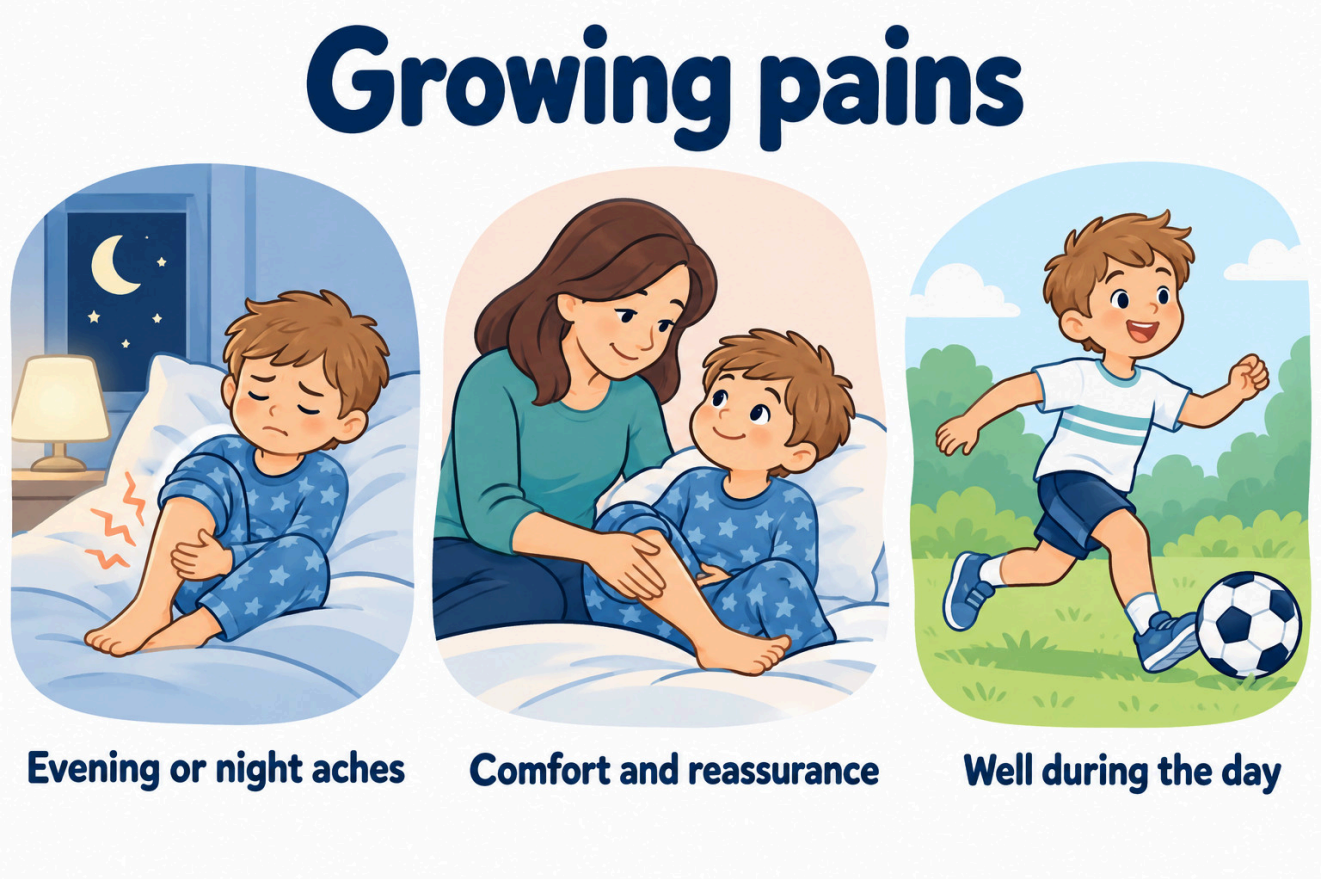
Growing Pains in Children

Information for children, parents and carers

Growing Pains in Children

A guide to symptoms, treatment and recovery



Understanding the condition

Growing pains are a common cause of leg aches in children, usually in the evening or at night. They do not damage joints or affect growth. The exact cause is unclear; muscle fatigue after active days may contribute.

Supporting your child

Typical growing pains affect both legs, with your child well and moving normally during the day. A limp, fever, swollen joint or unusual pain pattern needs medical assessment.

Symptoms and assessment

Understanding the cause and when to seek help

Who gets growing pains?

Most common between ages 3 and 12, in both boys and girls. Episodes may follow busy days with running, jumping or sport, and may run in families.

Typical symptoms

Aching or throbbing in both thighs, calves or behind the knees, lasting minutes to hours. Pain occurs late afternoon, evening or at night and can wake a child from sleep.

What is not typical?

Growing pains do not affect the joints and should not cause swelling, fever or a limp. Children are usually well during the day. Morning pain or pain in just one leg needs review.

How are they diagnosed?

A clinician considers the symptoms and performs an examination, which is usually normal. Tests or scans are generally unnecessary unless the pattern is unusual.

What is the outlook?

Episodes may come and go. Most children outgrow them by their early teens, with no long-term effects on growth, joints or movement.

Key message

Typical growing pains affect both legs, with your child well and moving normally during the day. A limp, fever, swollen joint or unusual pain pattern needs medical assessment.

Treatment and daily care

Activity guided by your child's healthcare team

Before starting activity

For a typical pattern already assessed when needed, simple comfort measures can help. Keep any calf or thigh stretches gentle and comfortable.



Activity guidance

Massage: gently rub the sore muscles for a few minutes.
Warmth: a warm bath or a comfortably warm pack may soothe.
Stretching: gentle calf and thigh stretches before bedtime.
Reassurance: explain that typical growing pains settle over time.

Important precautions

Avoid hot packs and forced stretches. Seek assessment for one-sided or morning pain, limping, joint swelling, redness or warmth, fever, rash, weight loss or worsening symptoms.

Treatment and next steps

Caring for your child and finding support

Comfort at home

Gentle massage, soothing warmth and reassurance often help. A warm bath or heat pack should be comfortably warm, never hot. Gentle calf and thigh stretches may help after a busy day.

Pain relief

If pain is significant, paracetamol or ibuprofen may be suitable. Follow the product instructions and advice for your child's age and weight. Ask a pharmacist or clinician if you are unsure.

Activity and monitoring

A child with typical growing pains is well and moves normally during the day. Note when pain occurs and whether the pattern changes. Persistent or unusual symptoms should be assessed.

Questions or concerns?

See a doctor for one-leg or morning pain, a limp, difficulty walking, swollen or hot joints, fever, rash, weight loss, feeling unwell, persistent or worsening pain, or any unusual symptoms.

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