

Transient Synovitis of the Hip

Transient synovitis of the hip (also known as irritable hip), is a common cause of a limp in children aged 3–8 years, and involves inflammation of the lining (synovium) of the hip joint.

The hip is a ball and socket joint between the round head of femur and the socket (acetabulum) in the pelvis. The joint is lined with synovium, and is filled with a small amount of synovial fluid (**Figure 1**). In irritable hip, there is an increased amount of this fluid in the joint space. Increased pressure within the hip joint causes pain.

The most common presentation is of a previously well child, with a sudden onset of pain and limping. There may be a recent history of viral infection or injury. Pain is usually felt in the groin, or sometimes in the front of the thigh or knee.

The child may refuse to take weight through the affected leg. There may be muscle spasm and restriction of hip movement. The child's temperature is sometimes mildly elevated.

The diagnosis of transient synovitis can only be made when other more serious conditions have been excluded. X-rays of the pelvis and hip are necessary. Blood tests are usually ordered, and in irritable hip show no evidence of infection. Ultra sound may show increased fluid within the joint, but this may also be seen in other conditions. Clinical examination by the orthopaedic surgeon is therefore important in deciding the course of treatment.

The principle of management is to rest the affected hip. Follow-up by the orthopaedic surgeon is required. Usually hip movement and pain improve after approximately one week, and the child should rest (usually at home) until symptoms resolve.

Failure to rest the hip for adequate time seems to lead to recurrent symptoms and a prolonged recovery. Five to ten percent of children will have a second episode.

In most children irritable hip is a short term problem from which the child makes a full recovery.

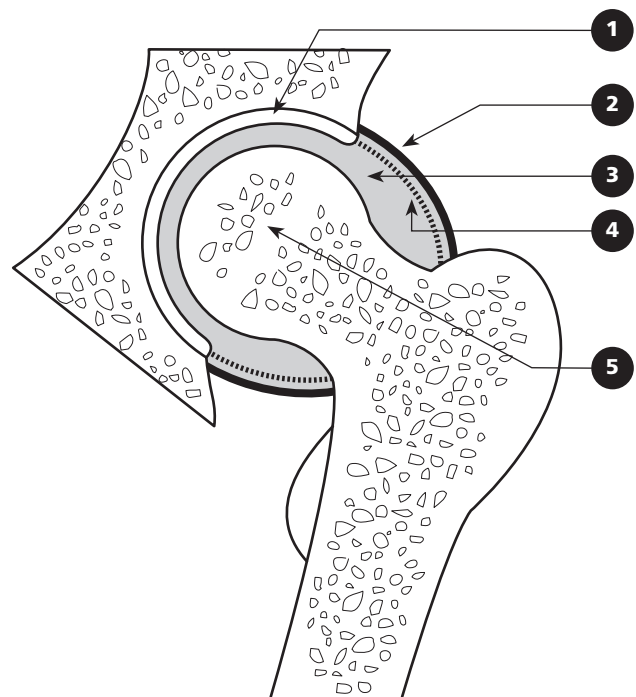


Figure 1. Hip joint – 1. acetabulum (socket); 2. joint capsule; 3. synovial fluid; 4. synovium; 5. femoral head (ball).