

Growing Pains

Growing pains are generalised leg aches which occur in 15–30 percent of children. The pain is most commonly felt in the muscles in the front of the thigh, behind the knee, and the calf.

Children with growing pains have good general health. The pains generally occur in the late afternoon or evening before bed, and there may be pain that wakes a sleeping child. The pain does not occur daily but tends to come and go, and is often worse after a very active day. Intermittent pain may continue for months or even several years. When there is no pain the child is active and not limited in any way.

Diagnosis of growing pains is one of exclusion, relying primarily on the child's medical history and a thorough physical examination to ensure that there is no other cause of pain.

It is thought that growing pains are the result of muscle strain and fatigue, linked with the muscle and bone changes that occur with growth. Growing pains cease when growth stops.

Children with growing pains should be treated with reassurance and symptomatic relief. Most pains are eased by the use of massage and gentle heat (warm bath or application of mild heat pack), and will also comfort an anxious child. Muscle stretches may be helpful before the child goes to bed (*Figure 1*). If necessary, give paracetamol or ibuprofen as directed by your doctor or pharmacist.

Please contact your general practitioner if any of the following symptoms occur with your child's pain:

- persistent pain, morning pain or swelling or redness in one particular area or joint,
- pain associated with an injury,
- limping,
- fever or general unwellness,
- weakness or tiredness,
- loss of appetite.

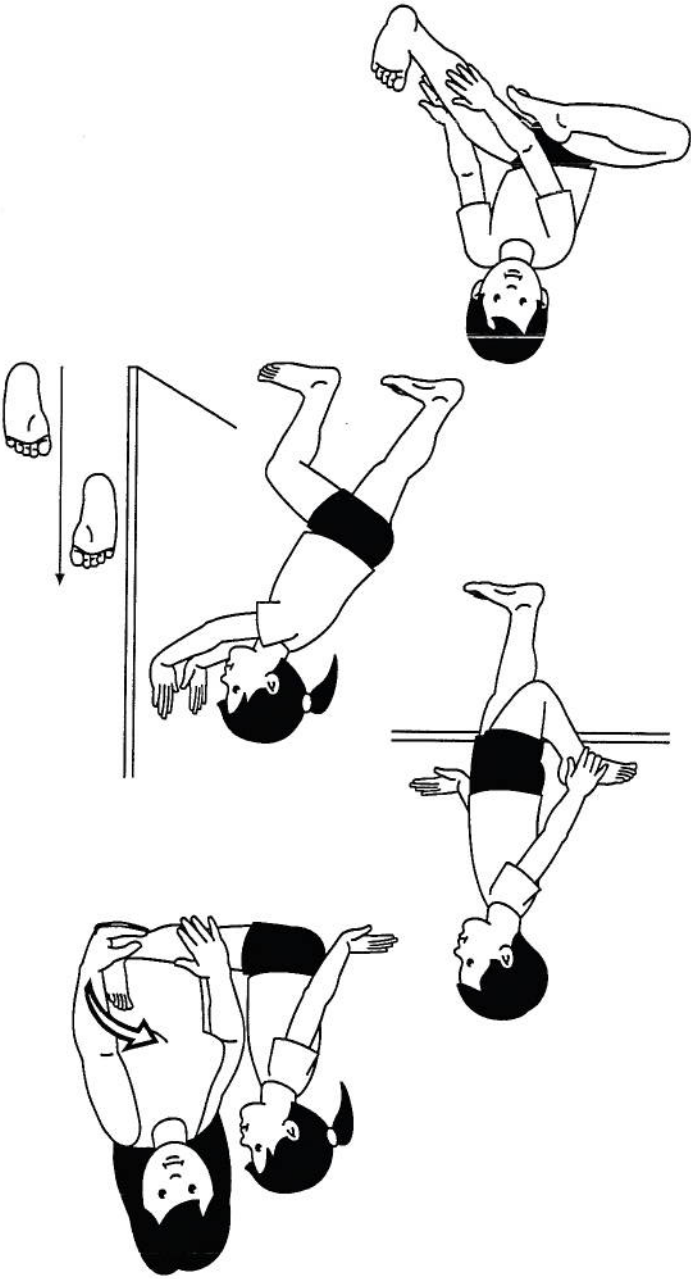


Figure 1. Muscle stretches (as advised by the physiotherapist).