



A guide to...

Limping *Patient Information*

Children's Emergency Department (CED)
Watford General Hospital



What is a limp?

A limp is defined as an asymmetric gait.

Why is my child limping?

We see many children who have been brought to the Emergency Department because they have developed a limp (and/or pain somewhere in the affected leg). Most of these children will have an "irritable hip" (see below) or another condition which does not need investigation to diagnose and will get better on its own.

There are many causes of a limp which range from self-limiting to serious. The clinician who has seen you has excluded more serious causes of limp in this instance.

What is an "Irritable Hip"?

Irritable hip is also known as Transient Synovitis, and is the most common cause of limp in children. The exact cause is not known but it often happens after a viral illness or an injury.

Your child may complain of pain in the hip, groin, thigh or knee, and may have difficulty walking or crawling. Usually only one side is affected. It is generally a mild condition which gets better on its own within two weeks.

What can I do to help my child at home?

You should encourage your child to rest the affected leg as much as possible over the next few days. This may mean that your child does not attend school or nursery for 48-72 hours.

Give regular pain relief medication such as paracetamol and / or ibuprofen., if age appropriate and advised by your clinician. Do not exceed the prescribed dose. Most children will show improvement over the next few days.

If your child is unwell, not improved at all, or is worse, then they need to be brought back to us for further assessment.

How long until my child is back to normal?

You can allow your child to gradually go back to their usual activities as they improve, but we advise that they do not do sport or strenuous activity for two weeks. Your child may still need pain relief medicine. Gradually reduce the number of times you give this in a day.

Does my child need an X-ray?

Your clinician will have assessed whether there is any benefit to your child having an X-ray. Often there is none, especially where there has been no known trauma.

If your child does not improve within the agreed timeframe, they may then need more investigation which might include an X-ray.

RED FLAG SIGNS

Seek urgent review if your child:

- Becomes unwell
- Develops a high temperature
- Has pain that is not managed by usual over the counter medications
- Has increasing or worsening pain
- Is unable to put any weight on the affected side at all, even after pain relief
- Has redness and swelling to any joint on the affected leg
- Has weakness to the affected leg
- Has unexplained bruising

These are symptoms that may indicate a more serious problem, and may need investigations to be done (eg, blood tests or X-rays), and may need a referral to a different team.

What if I am worried about my child?

- Contact GP or local pharmacy
- <https://www.hwehealthiertogether.nhs.uk/>
- You can use the NHS 111 service for advice and out of hours support
- Call 999 in a life threatening emergency

If you need this leaflet in another language, large print, Braille or audio version, please call **01923 217 187** or email **westherts.pals@nhs.uk**



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