

# Advice for parents and carers of a limping child

## Why is my child limping?

A child with a limp is a common reason for parents to attend the Emergency Department. Most of these children will have either an “irritable hip” (see below) or a minor injury. They normally get better without hospital treatment.

There are some other more serious causes of a limp such as joint or bone infection which do need hospital treatment. The Emergency Department staff will have ruled out these more serious causes by taking a history and examining your child carefully. Occasionally an x-ray will have been taken.

## What is an irritable hip?

Irritable hip (or transient synovitis) is the commonest cause of limp in childhood. It is due to inflammation (**not** infection) of the hip joint. 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 after one or two weeks.

## Does my child need to be seen again?

Yes, you should make an appointment for your child to be seen again within 48-72 hours in the Emergency Department Clinic.

**During that time, please contact the Emergency Department immediately if your child:**

- **becomes unwell**
- **develops a high temperature**
- **has increasing pain**
- **is unable to put any weight at all on the affected leg**

These are symptoms that may indicate a more serious problem.

## What can I do to help my child at home?

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 until the clinic appointment.

Give regular pain relief medicine such as ibuprofen or paracetamol, if required. Ibuprofen can be given every 6-8 hours (no more than 3 times in 24 hours) but remember it can make wheezing worse in children with asthma. Paracetamol can be

given every 4-6 hours (no more than 4 times in 24 hours). Do not exceed the recommended dose.

Most children will show some improvement over the next few days.

### **What will happen at the 48-72 hour appointment?**

This appointment gives us a chance to check on progress as we would expect most children to be getting better at this time. You will be seen by a senior Emergency Department doctor.

If your child is well and the limp/pain is improving, they will be discharged from the clinic.

If your child is unwell, not improved at all or is worse, then the doctor may arrange further investigations e.g. blood tests, X-rays or an ultrasound scan. Your child may then be referred to another team.

### **When can I expect my child to be back to normal?**

You can allow your child to gradually go back to their usual activities as they improve, but we would advise that they avoid sport or strenuous activity for 2 weeks. Your child may still need pain relief medicine. Gradually reduce the number of times you give it in a day as they get better.

We would expect your child to be back to normal within 1-2 weeks. **Please contact the Emergency Department if your child unexpectedly becomes worse in this time.**

If your child is not completely better in 2 weeks it is important that they see their General Practitioner (GP). Their GP will discuss with you whether it may be necessary to refer your child to a specialist doctor who deals with children's bones and joints. It may be helpful to take a copy of this leaflet with you.

### **If you have any problems, or for further advice please contact:**

- Emergency Department      01535 294481
- Your GP
- NHS 111                      111, or 111.nhs.uk
- The NHS website            www.nhs.uk – search for "irritable hip"

**By telephoning, we can ensure you get appropriate advice and do not wait unnecessarily in the Emergency Department.**

