

Limping in Children



What is a Limp?

A limp is when a child walks differently from normal, often favouring one leg. Limping may be obvious or subtle. It can happen suddenly or gradually and may or may not be painful.

Why Children Might Limp

Limping in children can have many causes, including:

1. **Injury** ○ Sprains, strains, fractures, or bruising.

- Limp may appear after a fall or accident.

2. Infection

- Infections in the bone or joint (osteomyelitis, septic arthritis) can cause pain and swelling.
- Usually associated with fever and redness.

3. Inflammatory Conditions

- Juvenile idiopathic arthritis or other autoimmune conditions may cause joint stiffness and pain.

4. Growth-Related Conditions

- Conditions such as **Perthes disease** (hip bone issue) or **slipped capital femoral epiphysis (SCFE)** can cause painless or painful limping.

5. Neurological or Muscle Problems

- Weakness in muscles, cerebral palsy, or other nerve/muscle issues can lead to abnormal walking patterns.

6. Other Causes

- Foot problems (flat feet, tight heel cords), leg length differences, or pain from hip, knee, or back can also cause limping.

Signs to Look Out For

Parents should seek urgent medical attention if the limp is associated with:

- Severe pain or sudden inability to walk
 - Swelling, redness, or warmth in a joint
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- Fever or feeling unwell
 - Recent significant trauma or fall
 - Persistent limp lasting more than a few days without improvement

What to Expect at the Doctor's Appointment

The doctor or physiotherapist may:

- Ask about your child's symptoms and medical history
 - Examine the child's hips, knees, and feet
 - Observe your child walking and standing
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- Order X-rays or other imaging if needed

- Blood tests if infection or inflammation is suspected

Management and Treatment

Treatment depends on the cause of the limp:

- **Minor injuries:** Rest, ice, compression, elevation (RICE), and pain relief.

- **Infections:** Antibiotics or hospital care if severe.
- **Inflammatory conditions:** Medication and physiotherapy.

- **Growth-related bone problems:** May need monitoring, physiotherapy, or surgery.
- **Muscle or neurological issues:** Physiotherapy, orthotics, or specialist referral.

Home Care

- Encourage rest and avoid strenuous activity until reviewed
- Give age-appropriate pain relief if recommended by your doctor
- Monitor for worsening symptoms such as swelling, redness, fever, or inability to bear weight

When to Seek Immediate Medical Attention Call

your doctor or go to A&E if your child:

- Cannot walk at all
- Has a swollen, red, or hot joint
- Develops a fever
- Has had a recent injury with severe pain

Key Points

- Limping in children is **common** but should not be ignored.
- Most causes are minor, but some require urgent care.
- Early assessment can prevent complications and improve outcomes.

Remember: Always trust your instincts as a parent—if something seems wrong with your child's walking, seek medical advice promptly.
