

Emergency Department

Patient Information

Limping Child

Information for patients, parents and carers

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 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 Doctor 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.

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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 medicine such as paracetamol and/or ibuprofen. Paracetamol can be given every four – six hours (no more than four times in 24 hours). Ibuprofen can be given every six – eight hours (no more than three times in 24 hours). Do not exceed the prescribed dose. Most children will show some improvement over the next few days. If your child is unwell, not improved at all or is worse, then your child will need to be brought back to the Emergency Department for further assessment.

Will any follow-up be arranged for my child?

It is possible that your child has been given an appointment for the Emergency Department Review Clinic where they will be seen by one of the Emergency Department consultants. This is to ensure that things are getting better and to carry out further tests and/or referral if they are not. If you have been given an appointment and you feel that your child is completely back to normal by the time the appointment comes around, it is fine to cancel the appointment. We would appreciate it if you could phone to let us know that your child is better (on the phone number below) so that the appointment can be given to someone else.

Raigmore Hospital Emergency Department telephone number:
01463 704444

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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 advise 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 it in a day as they get better. We would expect your child to be back to normal within one - two weeks.

What should I look for in my child after being discharged back home?

Please contact the Emergency Department immediately or bring them back to the Emergency Department if your child:

- **becomes unwell**
- **develops a high temperature**
- **has increasing or worsening of pain**
- **is unable to put any weight at all on the affected leg**
- **has redness and swelling to any joint on the affected leg**
- **has weakness to the affected leg**

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

Please contact the Emergency Department if your child unexpectedly becomes worse or does not get completely better in 2 weeks.

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