

CHILDREN · 4 MIN READ

Growing pains: real, common, and manageable

Achy legs at bedtime are common between three and twelve. What growing pains are, what they are not, and red flags.



● What growing pains look like

Classic growing pains: an ache in both legs (often shins, calves or behind the knees) in the evening or at night, sometimes waking a child who was fine all day, and completely gone by morning. They come and go in phases, often after busy, active days, and are most common between about three and twelve.

Despite the name, nobody is sure they're caused by growing. A better name would be 'busy-day legs': muscles that have worked hard and let you know about it at night.

● What helps

Warm baths before bed, gentle massage (most children love this bit), calf and thigh stretches as a wind-down routine, and reassurance. The pain is real, so take it seriously and comfort them; being believed matters to children. If phases follow very active days, that's a pattern worth knowing, not a reason to stop the activity.

If aches are frequent, physiotherapy can check whether tight calves, flat feet, hypermobility or simple deconditioning are loading the legs more than they need to, and give you a plan.

● Red flags: see your GP

Growing pains are always in both legs and always gone by morning. See your GP promptly if pain is in one leg only, if there's limping, swelling, redness or fever, if pain is there during the day or getting steadily worse, if your child is losing weight or unusually tired, or if the pain wakes them night after

night. Those patterns need a doctor first, not a physio.

This guide is general information written by a paediatric physiotherapist, not medical advice about your child. If you are worried, trust your instinct: speak to your GP or health visitor, or get in touch with us.



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