



Growing Pains

Almost every third child suffers from episodic leg pain, which occurs mainly in the evening and at night. These complaints, known as growing pains, occur primarily in preschool and elementary school children. Despite their frequency, they are a poorly understood problem.

How do growing pains present themselves?

Affected children usually complain of bilateral leg pain, which occurs late in the afternoon, in the evening or at night and disappears by the next morning. Depending on the severity, the symptoms can occur once or twice a month or almost every evening. Sometimes, they are very intense, in a manner that the children wake up crying from their sleep. As a result, the child's sleep as well as its parents can be disturbed.

Growing pains are usually in both legs, although they can alternate between left and right. *The painful area cannot be localized precisely and a larger area is demonstrated by the child.* Such complaints can rarely occur in the arms or back. The pain can last a few minutes to hours. Symptoms tend to be worse after days with increased physical activity.

If the complaints are as described above, no further clarification is necessary.

In case of the following symptoms, caution is advised:

- The pain always occurs on the same side
- Visible changes of the affected body part
- Swelling of a joint
- Limping
- Fever

These signs may indicate a different cause and should be further investigated by a doctor. In unclear cases, it is helpful to keep a pain diary before a doctor's consultation in order to know exactly when, on which side and exactly where the symptoms occur. Growing pains should not be confused with other diseases that can occur specifically during growth, such as Osgood-Schlatter's disease, an overload in the area of the kneecap ligament.

What can be done? In most cases, symptoms can be reduced by massaging the painful area with body lotion or a warming ointment. Some children also like a hot water bottle. Unfortunately, a universal therapy for these complaints is not known. A connection to **flat**feet, which are still common at this age, couldn't be found. In case of vitamin D deficiency, the administration of vitamin D drops can reduce the occurrence of symptoms. Other food supplements such as magnesium or iron have been described as helpful. In addition, performing a stretching program before going to bed has been shown to reduce the incidence of nighttime symptoms. Instructions for a short program can be found below. In

persistent cases, with recurring awakening, the administration of a pain reliever such as paracetamol (Dafalgan®) or ibuprofen (Algifor®) is sensible and appropriate. Most important is to know that, despite numerous sleepless nights, this type of complaint decreases with age and usually disappears after the first 10 years of life.

Stretching program:



Explanation:

Each of the stretching exercises should be performed 5 times for at least 10 seconds. The goal is to create a strong, but absolutely bearable stretch stimulus.

1. Calf muscles and hamstrings:

- With one hand the forefoot is pushed upward towards the knee, with the other hand the knee is held extended. Alternate right and left

2. Adductors:

- Both hips are bent and spread apart, the surfaces of the feet are placed against one another. The hands press the knees downward.

3. Front thigh muscles and foot lifting muscles:

- The child is lying stomach down. The forefeet are pressed towards the buttocks.