

INFORMATION FOR PATIENTS, PARENTS, GUARDIANS AND CARERS

Increased mobility in children and adolescents

This leaflet aims to provide you with information regarding increased joint mobility in children and adolescents.

Introduction

All joints have varying ranges of movement. Increased joint range, or hypermobility, refers to a larger range of movement in multiple joints. Our ligaments and muscles provide our joints with stability and receptors within the joint inform us of our position in the environment. In hypermobility, these tissues tend to be more lax and therefore the joints are more flexible.

To illustrate how a joint works, think of a door hinge and a door stop. The hinge is like the joint and the door stop prevents the door from swinging too far and damaging the wall. Likewise a joint with supporting structures that are too loose or stretched will allow extra movement past the normal range of motion.

Increased mobility is extremely common in children. It is normal for young children to have a far greater range of joint movement than adults, and this becomes less problematic as children get older, but a small percentage will remain very flexible. Studies have shown that up to 71% of children under 8 years old and 55% of 4-14 year olds are hypermobile.



Many people with joint hypermobility have few or no problems related to their increased range of movement, for example in gymnasts, dancers and swimmers; this increase in joint mobility provides an advantage. However, in some cases excess movement may cause brief discomfort or pain and a growth spurt - lack of exercise or an accident can make this worse.

Increased mobility is not considered a disease or illness, but a **normal** finding by medical professionals. Regardless of the reason behind your increased joint mobility, the therapy advice remains the same.

Common concerns and symptoms

Children may initially take longer to achieve their developmental milestones such as crawling, walking, and running and may be more likely to bottom shuffle.

Other frequent findings include:



PAIN

Usually towards the end of the day or after specific activities. You may also notice swelling around the joint.



CO-ORDINATION

The receptors that inform the joint of its position don't get the same messages as joint with less movement leading to poorer co-ordination and difficulty with daily tasks such as handwriting, using a knife and fork, and dressing.



FLAT FEET

This is very common in children with increased joint mobility. They usually benefit from supportive footwear.



CLICKY JOINTS

Research has shown there is no good evidence that increased joint mobility or "clicky" joints leads to arthritis.



FATIGUE

Children may experience two types of fatigue; specific joint or muscle fatigue because the joint and muscles are working extra hard, or general overall fatigue due to the increased effort to perform activities.

It is not fully understood why some children have more symptoms than others, and it is not necessarily related to the degree of increase joint mobility. However, it is believed that these problems are related to poor muscle strength, poor muscle stamina and poor control of joint movement, rather than the hypermobility itself.



If you have an increased laxity of your joints, it is even more important for you to have greater muscle strength to support those joints; even more than those who do not have increased joint mobility.

As a child develops and becomes more active, they often become stronger, co-ordination improves and they report less pain and less fatigue.



MANAGEMENT ADVICE AND TIPS



for Increased Joint Mobility in Children and Adolescents



Strengthen

Exercise should not be avoided. Keeping active and strong is important and helps reduce joint pain as fitness and balance improve over time. Encourage a variety of activities e.g. swimming, cycling, P.E., dance, yoga and Pilates.

Your physiotherapist can also show you some specific exercises to help strengthen.

Pacing



Pacing means to gradually increase an activity in order to achieve a goal.

Plan your activities and spread them out over the day/week. Plan your rest periods before you become too sore.

Work out what is important and eliminate unnecessary tasks until you have built up your strength and fitness.

Pain Management

Aches and pains associated with increased joint mobility are usually as a result of muscle fatigue, not damage or injury. Pain killers are not usually effective.

Try warm baths or hot water bottles. Distraction can also be useful.



Joint Protection

Avoid doing "party tricks" and showing friends how much you bend as this can overstretch your joints.

Think about how you are using your joints e.g. use your body to open doors rather than wrists; in standing try to avoid over-straightening your knees.

The stronger you are, the more your muscle help protect your joints.



Posture

The way that we carry our bodies, largely affects how much strain is put on joints.

Good posture is important at all times.

Considering posture and movement helps us to be more efficient. Discourage children from sitting in a "W Sit".

Pilates and core strengthening exercises can help with this.



Footwear

You should try to wear supportive shoes as a good foot position can help to relieve knee and leg pain.

Key things to look for:

- A lightweight shoe/boot with strong sole to act as a shock absorber and supportive around the heel/ankle.

- Shoes that fasten with laces.

Avoid:

- Slip on shoes or shoes with shallow sides.

When to Seek Advice

Physiotherapy is often useful to help provide exercise and advice.

If your child is having problems with activities of daily living, a referral to Occupational Therapy may be useful.

Seek advice from your GP if you are concerned that your child is experiencing frequent or severe pain or if the symptoms are significantly causing disruption to day to day life.



Contact details

Therapy Services Department
Clinic 10
King's Mill Hospital
Mansfield Road
Sutton in Ashfield
Notts
NG17 4JL

Telephone: 01623 672384, or 01623 622515, extension 4157 or 07787273070.

Further sources of information

NHS Choices: www.nhs.uk/conditions

Our website: www.sfh-tr.nhs.uk

Patient Experience Team (PET)

PET is available to help with any of your compliments, concerns or complaints, and will ensure a prompt and efficient service.

King's Mill Hospital: 01623 672222

Newark Hospital: 01636 685692

Email: sfh-tr.PET@nhs.net

If you would like this information in an alternative format, for example large print or easy read, or if you need help with communicating with us, for example because you use British Sign Language, please let us know. You can call the Patient Experience Team on 01623 672222 or email sfh-tr.PET@nhs.net.

This document is intended for information purposes only and should not replace advice that your relevant health professional would give you. External websites may be referred to in specific cases. Any external websites are provided for your information and convenience. We cannot accept responsibility for the information found on them.

If you require a full list of references for this leaflet (if relevant) please email sfh-tr.patientinformation@nhs.net or telephone 01623 622515, extension 6927.

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