

FACTSHEET



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Anterior knee pain in children and adolescents

What is anterior knee pain?

Anterior knee pain is a common complaint in children and adolescents. Pain is felt at the front (anterior) of the knee or near the patella (kneecap).

This is a common condition which is diagnosed when all other underlying conditions have been excluded.

How common is it?

Children of all ages often feel anterior knee pain. It is most common during periods of rapid growth, (generally young adolescents), or with increased sports participation. It is more common in girls than in boys.

What is the cause?

Knee pain can be due to many underlying causes. It is important for a doctor to see your child in order to find the cause of the pain. In some cases the exact cause may not be found and in these children the diagnosis of "Anterior knee pain" can be used.

Below is a list of other conditions which may cause pain in the knee:

- Inflammation around or near the knee joint
- Referred pain from a problem in the hip (make sure the doctor checks both hips and knees)
- Cartilage defect in the knee joint (Osteochondritis dissecans)
- Mechanical stress on the bones and tendons at the front of the knee from physical activity and / or rapid growth
- The kneecap (patella) may be out of alignment

- The ligaments and other soft tissues around the knee may be irritated or inflamed
- A bony tumour may be present (extremely rare).

What problems will occur?

The knee can sometimes look swollen; however the anterior knee pain will not usually cause any structural damage. In most cases it is safe for your child to continue their regular physical activity. Anterior knee pain usually disappears completely when your child stops growing, or changes their activities for a period of time.

What treatment will be needed?

Pain can be a concern for children and their families. Anterior knee pain is rarely caused by a serious medical condition. In most cases a stretching and exercise program designed by a physiotherapist can reduce your child's pain. An elastic knee guard may help and your child's physiotherapist may choose to tape your child's knee.

Will surgery be needed?

As long as other underlying causes of knee pain have been excluded, there is no need for surgery in children with anterior knee pain. This will be discussed with your child's orthopaedic surgeon.

Remember:

Most children with anterior knee pain will improve under the help of a physiotherapist, a home exercise program, activity modification and the passing of time.