

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 experienced at the front (anterior) of the knee or near the patella (kneecap).

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?

The knee pain is often described by children in a non-specific manner and there are a number of possible causes. In some cases the exact cause may not be found. Below is a list of some possible causes:

- Inflammation around or near the knee joint
- Referred pain from a problem in the hip (ensure the doctor checks both hips and knees)
- 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.

What problems will occur?

The knee can sometimes appear swollen; however the pain itself will not cause any structural damage. In most cases is safe for your child to continue their regular physical activity. The pain usually disappears completely when your child stops growing, or becomes a little less active.

What treatment will be required?

Pain can be a concern for children and their families. Anterior knee pain is rarely caused by a serious medical condition. In the majority of 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 necessary?

Depending on the cause of your child's knee pain, surgery may be required in some circumstances. This should be discussed with your child's orthopaedic surgeon and you on an individual basis.

Remember:

The vast majority of children with anterior knee pain will improve under the guidance of a physiotherapist and home exercise program.