Children’s Services: Paediatric Rheumatology

Joint Hypermobility - information for children and young people

What is hypermobility?

Generalised joint hypermobility is a condition where a number of joints have an extra range of movement. This condition can be referred to as joint laxity, joint hypermobility or being double jointed.

**Hyper** means more and **Mobility** means movement

Children are more flexible than adults. Some children are more supple than others which allow them to move their joints and bodies into unusual positions. The role of ligaments is to stabilise joints and in hypermobility these ligaments are more lax which allows the joint to move more.

*Pictures below show examples of Hypermobility*

How common is it?

Generally, children are flexible, some more than others. As children grow they become less supple. In most cases hypermobility peaks at the age of five and tends to reduce as we get older.

There are a small number of people who experience difficulties associated with hypermobility. Providing they remain fit and strong, this condition is unlikely to cause problems in the future.
Common symptoms of hypermobility

- ‘clicky’ joints
- clumsiness/ falling over
- flat feet
- tiredness after walking long distances
- pain and joint swelling less than 48 hours
- difficulties with hand writing

What can be done to help?

It is essential to increase the muscle strength around the affected joints, to provide additional support for them and improve the joint stability.

Low impact exercise, such as swimming and cycling will help maintain muscle strength, physical fitness and well-being. Normal activities such as PE, playtime and dance should be continued.

Pacing activity if you have hypermobility

If there is any muscle pain after activity it is important to not give up. Resting for a short period may help but if muscles are not used they will become de-conditioned leading to further pain and discomfort the next time any activity is undertaken. Pacing of physical activities is needed to ensure a person’s tolerance and ability is gradually increased according to their own level. Avoid the “boom and bust” cycle - do not do too much activity on one day, but spread it throughout the week.

Pain management

You may suffer aches and pains associated with hypermobility and these are usually a result of muscle weakness and fatigue.

This pain is not a result of injury or damage - warm baths or a hot water bottle (wrapped in a towel) may help.

It is expected that as muscles become stronger the pain will decrease. Pain killers (analgesia) are not usually very helpful - but may help from time to time. Simple pain relief such as Paracetamol or anti-inflammatories such as Ibuprofen can be taken - see manufacturer’s guidelines.
Footwear

Supportive footwear is recommended. Key points to consider with footwear are:

- Shoes which are stiff around the heel
- Sturdy soles, which provide shock absorbance
- Lace up/buckle shoes that support the whole foot

Avoid shoes with thin soles, no heel support, for example. Flip flops, pumps or slip on shoes

Recommended activities to develop muscle strength

**Upper Limbs:** It is common to experience pain in wrists and hands with activity such as handwriting, gripping and using cutlery. Please speak to your school teacher regarding support with providing pen grips if needed. We also recommend the following activities:

- use of modelling clay
- wringing out cloths/sponges – car washing, window cleaning etc.
- use of stress ball (squeezing)
- games requiring fine manipulation e.g. Lego, wind-up toys

**Lower limbs:**

- Try to remain as active as possible, e.g. walking to and from school, cycling, swimming and playing sport.

Useful further information can be found:

1. ARUK website
   - [http://www.arthritisresearchuk.org/arthritis-information/conditions/joint-hypermobility.aspx](http://www.arthritisresearchuk.org/arthritis-information/conditions/joint-hypermobility.aspx)

2. NHS Choices
   - [http://www.nhs.uk/conditions/joint-hypermobility/Pages/Introduction.aspx](http://www.nhs.uk/conditions/joint-hypermobility/Pages/Introduction.aspx)
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Please note: We do not currently hold many leaflets in other languages; written translation requests are funded and agreed by the department who has authored the leaflet.

**Document history**

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