Growing & grown up pains (& shocking solutions!)

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In the last edition we highlighted some of the overuse injuries commonly seen in active children. We identified that they all affect the bone/tendon junction and that they are due to several causative factors, including biomechanical issues, over activity and rapid growth.

Many children experience symptoms where the origins and causes are less clear. These conditions are often included in the classification of growing pains. This is often a throw away diagnosis for any pain that does not fit one of the more easily classified conditions. Ironically it is likely these pains are nothing to do with growth at all.

Growing pains are felt as intense, cramp like pains usually in both legs (the fronts of the thighs, calves and behind the knees are common areas) and symptoms are almost exclusively felt in the evenings or at night and affect children between the ages of four and 12. In many instances they cause significant distress and often the child will wake in floods of tears. Despite this, growing pains are harmless and tend to occur in phases. They are often felt after very active days and also tend to be more prevalent in children with loose, flexible joints. They should not affect the ability of the child to walk and there will be no signs of any physical injury such as swelling or heat.

Why growing pains occur is unclear, but it is thought they are not linked to growth spurts or any dietary deficiency. When diagnosing growing pains one of the most helpful tests is how the child responds to touch whilst in pain. The overuse bone/tendon conditions such as Osgood Schlatters and Severs that we discussed in the last article are always accompanied by significant localised tenderness and inflammation.

Growing pains are different - the child will gain relief from being held and having the area massaged. Heat will also provide some symptom relief.

There are a wide range of musculoskeletal problems that can affect the active child. At Tudor Physiotherapy our careful history taking and assessment will allow us to accurately diagnose the source of symptoms. For growing pains (not growth related!) we offer reassurance and encourage parents to massage and stretch the affected area. We will also check any biomechanical problems and address these as a way of preventing other potential overuse injuries. The management of the specific overuse injuries will usually require a period of activity modification, stretching and strengthening exercises and careful monitoring of improvement so that a safe return to sport can be made. Growing pains should not need the child to abstain from sporting activity.

So why do adults not get growing pains if they are nothing to do with growth at all? Well maybe they do….. Doctors are currently investigating whether there is a link between growing pains and restless leg syndrome. This is a condition of the nervous system that causes an overwhelming urge to move the legs and an unpleasant sensation that eases once the legs are moved. It is not known whether growing pains are an early form of this or completely unrelated.

What we do know is that active adults suffer from very similar overuse conditions to the growing and active child and we see conditions such as Achilles tendonopathy, patella tendonitis and tennis elbow on a daily basis.

To manage these we have an exciting new treatment option - SHOCKWAVE THERAPY. This involves the delivery of high intensity sound waves that interact with the tissues of the body to bring about a cascade of healing and pain relieving effects. This is especially effective in treating those often chronic and stubborn conditions mentioned above. As the injured area is returned to normal, functionality is restored and pain is relieved. After three or four sessions some studies report over 80% of patients to be pain free or to feel a significant reduction in pain.

For more information refer to our website: www.tudorphysiotherapy.com or call 01789 200935. We have also set up a Twitter account so please follow us @tudorphysio and look out for information and advice.

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