

Coxa Vara

Fact Sheet

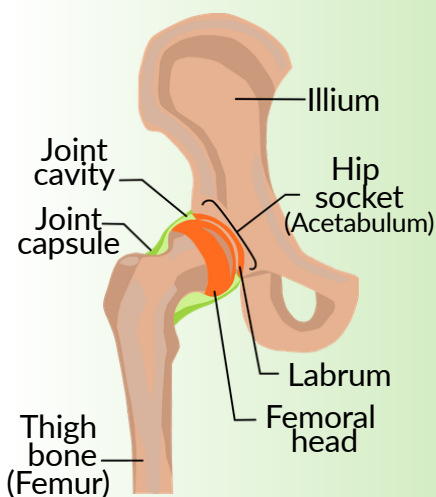
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What is coxa vara?

Coxa vara is a rare condition of the hip. To understand this condition, it helps to look at the shape of the thigh bone (femur). Most of the femur runs straight down the leg, while the top part angles inwards to meet the hip joint.

The Hip Joint



In children with coxa vara, this angle is smaller than usual, typically less than 120° , in other children the angle is usually around 125° - 135° .

Because of this, one leg may appear slightly shorter, and your child may develop a limp or an unusual walking pattern.

The condition can sometimes be present at birth (congenital), but this is uncommon. More often, it develops as a child grows and may not become noticeable until they are around two or three years old.

Why does it happen?

Coxa vara affects around 1 in 25,000 children, it can affect either hip and boys and girls are affected equally. In most cases, the exact cause is not known.

When coxa vara is present at birth, it may sometimes occur alongside other conditions that affect bone or limb development, such as:

- Proximal focal femoral deficiency (PFFD)
- Fibular hemimelia

If this applies to your child, your specialist team will explain what it means and what support is available.

Diagnosis

When symptoms of coxa vara become apparent, typically when the child begins to walk, diagnosis is usually made using X-ray.

The condition may cause the femur to turn outwards, and this may result in problems with the knee, such as the kneecap (patella) moving out of place, or strain on knee ligaments.

Symptoms of coxa vara may include:

- pain in the leg and/or hip – (the condition can also be painless)
- a one-sided limp or 'waddling walk' that gets progressively worse
- stiffness when trying to move the leg out to the side – for instance, into a 'frog-like' position
- a slight difference in leg length

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Treatment

Mild cases may require no treatment, follow up checks may be arranged to monitor the hip as it grows.

In more severe cases, surgery may be recommended. This may include lengthening of the femur, to improve movement of the joint, reduce any difference in leg length and reduce rotation in the upper leg.

An operation to shape the bone (osteotomy) may be performed to improve the hip joint. Following hip surgery, a child may require some time in a 'hip spica' cast. Steps have produced 'Hip Surgery and Spica Cast Care, a Parent's Guide', with more information about the cast and care process.

Follow-up

Almost all children with coxa vara will need follow-up appointments over time, especially while they are still growing. These appointments help the medical team monitor:

- the shape of the hip
- leg length
- hip movement
- walking pattern
- whether further treatment may be needed

Regular follow-up is an important part of making sure your child's hip continues to develop as well as possible.

When will treatment start?

The timing of surgery will depend on the age at which the child is diagnosed, the severity of the condition and can differ between treatment centres.

Sometimes, when a child is diagnosed very young, surgery is delayed until they are five or six.

This may be because the hip is still developing, the condition is mild, or the child is managing well.

In other cases, a child may undergo surgery at around 18 months, however, this decision will depend on their individual circumstances.

How will it affect my child?

Mild and successfully treated cases will have little impact on a child into adulthood.

It is important to seek medical advice if you notice any of the symptoms of coxa vara in your child when they begin to learn to walk. If coxa vara is left undiagnosed/untreated it may lead to problems with walking in later life and can increase the risk of osteoarthritis.



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Support

Steps is here to help

Contact Steps: +44 (0) 1925 750271 to answer any practical questions you have.

Email: info@steps-charity.org.uk with questions.

Family Contact Service: If you want to talk to someone who has been through a similar situation, one on one.

Facebook Group: A closed group where you can talk about your worries, share helpful tips, and find emotional support.