

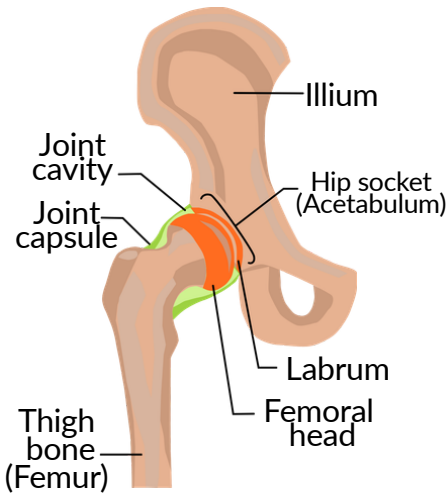
Perthes' Disease

Fact Sheet

Updated March 2024



The Hip Joint



What is Perthes' disease?

Perthes' Disease is the shorter name for Legg-Calve-Perthes' Disease, it is a condition that some children have which affects their hip or hips.

The bit of your leg above the knee, but below the hip, is called the thigh. Inside the thigh is a long bone called the femur. The top of the femur is shaped like a ball, and it fits into the rest of your body at the hip in a bony socket (like a ball of ice cream sitting in an ice cream cone). In Perthes' Disease, there is a problem with the blood supply to the ball of the hip joint, which causes it to become soft and change shape, like the ball of ice cream melting.

Why do I have Perthes' Disease?

The reason why some kids have this condition isn't very clear. It's not because they got hurt or something is wrong with their blood vessels anywhere else.

But it happens more often to boys than girls, about four times more! It more often shows up when kids are between five and nine years old, especially if they're super active and love to run around and play.

The good news is that, as time goes by and you get older, the blood vessels in your hip start to grow back and the top of the femur bone starts to rebuild and grow back. It's a bit like when you break a bone, it isn't fixed overnight but it needs time to grow and heal. So, it might take a few years, but most kids with Perthes' Disease can get better and be just as active as before! Some kids will need an operation, but many will not.

Diagnosis

There are a few things that might be a sign of Perthes' Disease, for example walking in an unusual way (limping), difficulty moving the leg properly, or pain.

Pain can be different for everyone; it's often in the knee or hip but could be anywhere in the leg, can come on suddenly or slowly, and may be achy or sharp.

To find out if it is Perthes' Disease, the doctor will take an X-ray picture, which is completely painless. The doctor might also do some blood tests to make sure it's not an infection. In some cases, they might use an MRI machine (this can be noisy) or a bone scan to help see exactly what is happening in the hip.

In short, Perthes' is where disruptions in the blood supply to the hip, affect the growth of the ball part of the joint (femoral head). The femoral head becomes squashed, affecting how the hip joint works which can be painful.

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Will my hip get better?

Lots of kids with Perthes' Disease will just get better, without an operation (where the doctor has to go in and mend something in your body). But doctors have different ideas about how to help, and it will be different for each child. They might give you special medicine to stop it hurting, or they might tell you things you should and shouldn't do. In some cases, your doctor might ask you to use crutches, a walking frame, or a wheelchair for some time to help give your hip time to heal. But sometimes the operation is the best option.

What will the doctor do?

There are many different treatments. The one you receive will depend on what your doctor recommends and what part of the world you live in.

Containment: The doctors want to ensure that the soft 'ice cream' on the hip stays in the 'ice cream scoop'. There are two main types of containment, you may even get a combination of the two:

Containment through activity: Looking at the hip regularly, checking on the shape. They might recommend physiotherapy, exercise, or pain management during this time.

Containment with surgery: Surgery may be recommended. The doctor will talk about which one you need

- Changing either the 'socket' (Pelvic Osteotomy), or the 'ball' (Femoral Osteotomy).
- Making the 'cup' part bigger, using bone from your own pelvis (Shelf Acetabuloplasty)

Other Surgery: additional surgery to help the hip regrow.

Pain management: Finding ways to reduce your pain.

Weight relief: Not putting weight through your leg, this should only be for a short time.

Physiotherapy: Seeing a person who will help you move better, sometimes in a pool.

After some operations, your doctor might put you in a special hard bandage called a Hip Spica Cast. You can read about this on the [Steps website](#)

What about when I'm older?

Most children with Perthes' Disease will see their hips get better as they grow. That's because as we grow, so do our hips! The blood flow will get better, and the shape of the cup and ball will change.

What your hip feels like when you're all grown up will depend on how round the end of your thigh bone is once it's finished changing. If it's nice and round, then that's good news and your hip will move well.

But sometimes an operation is needed when children are older to make the bone round. For a few, the bone might stay squashed, or the cup and ball joint might not fit nicely, even with all the doctors' help.



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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

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