Proximal femoral focal deficiency (PFFD)

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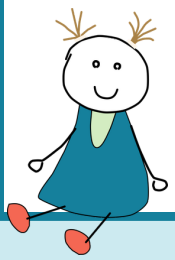
Fact Sheet



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Steps is the leading charity working for all those whose lives are affected by childhood lower limb conditions

What is proximal femoral focal deficiency or PFFD?

Proximal - Top of
Femoral - Thigh Bone
Focal - In the
Deficiency - Shortening

A shortening in the top of the thigh bone.

The first noticeable effect of PFFD will usually be a leg length difference, with one side being shorter than the other. Every child is different and PFFD leg length difference can be small or large, you may not see any differences for a long time.

Key Words

Cartilage - A soft material that can harden to become bone, although it stays soft and squidgy in some places like the end of your nose.
Growth plate - Found at the ends of bones, growth plates are made of special cells that create cartilage. Usually, as you grow, the growth plate keeps making more cartilage, which turns into bone. This helps your limbs grow to their full length as you get older!

Why does it happen?

The growth plate at the top of your thigh bone doesn't work the way it should and so doesn't produce enough cartilage, and the cartilage it does produce might not turn into solid bone. This can mean your thigh bone might be a different shape and length on one side of your body.

Diagnosis

Before Birth:
Sometimes, PFFD can be spotted even before a baby is born! Doctors use a special machine called an ultrasound to take pictures of the baby's bones while they're still in the belly. This helps them measure the leg bones.

Shortly After Birth:
After the baby is born, doctors do a check called the Newborn and Infant Physical Examination (NIPE). They aren't looking for PFFD specifically, but they might notice if one leg looks different.

Later On:
Sometimes, PFFD isn't noticed until the baby grows a bit and the leg difference becomes easier to see. This may lead to X-rays or other tests such as MRI (magnetic resonance imaging) which your doctor will discuss with you.

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Treatment

What the doctors recommend will depend on things like what type of PFFD you have, how your hip is working, and how much it is affecting you day to day.

Doctors will talk with your parents or carer about what the options are and what might be the best treatments. Usually, they will recommend a combination of treatments and not just one.

They might do different things like:

- **Observation**: If your difference in leg length isn't causing any problems, the doctors might just want to watch and wait. They will check your legs regularly to see how they're growing.
- **Insoles and shoe lifts**: If the difference is small, the doctor might send you to see a special doctor called an orthotist. They will make special insoles or shoe lifts to help even out the length.
- **Prosthetic leg**: If walking is difficult the doctor might send you to a prosthetist who will make something that fits over your shorter leg so it's the same length as your longer leg.
- **Physiotherapy**: If your leg causes pain or makes it hard to walk, or if you are wearing a prosthetic leg the doctor might send you to a physiotherapist. They will help you move better and feel less pain.
- **Surgery**: In some cases, doctors might suggest an operation. The most common are a Leg Lengthening operation or a reconstructive amputation and you can read more about this on the Steps website.

Tips

For parents at hospital appointments

- Take someone with you - a second set of ears means you get more information
- Write questions down in advance and take a notebook to jot down answers
- Ask about follow up and more information
- Encourage the child to ask any questions they have

What does the future look like?

The future looks bright, children with PFFD go on to do amazing things, even whilst having their treatments. They attend school, play with friends, go on family holidays, just like everyone else.

Going to the doctor and getting help as soon as you have concerns makes the biggest positive long term impact, it means that you can find the right treatment for you and know how to help yourself if you experience discomfort later in life.

This can be an emotional journey, as there are lots of doctors appointments and lots of decisions to make. Children can find it tiring, and that's okay, there is nothing wrong with a few recovery naps.

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Support Steps is here to help.

Helpline: +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