Transient synovitis in children
(Irritable hip)
Information for parents and carers
Paediatric Emergency Department

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What is Transient synovitis (irritable hip)?

Irritable hip (or transient synovitis) is the most common cause of limp in children. It is due to inflammation of the lining of the hip joint. The cause is unknown, although in some cases your child may have had a recent viral infection. Sometimes this condition occurs after a fall or injury. It is most often seen in children aged between three and 10.

What are the signs and symptoms?

Your child may have a limp or difficulty crawling or standing and may complain of pain in the hip, groin, thigh or knee. Usually only one side is affected. A small number of children with irritable hip go on to have further episodes.

What is the treatment?

It is a mild condition that will get better on its own. Rest is usually all that is needed. It should start to improve in around three days and symptoms should have completely resolved within two weeks.

If your child is in pain, painkillers, such as paracetamol or non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs) e.g. ibuprofen, can help relieve pain and reduce inflammation. Antibiotics are not required as this is not an infection.

Will my child need further tests?

Usually, no tests are required. Sometimes, X-rays of the hip or lower limbs are performed, especially if there has been a recent fall or injury to exclude any bone abnormalities.

What can we do at home?

- Encourage your child to rest at home
- Your child will naturally adopt the most comfortable position for themselves
- Painkillers such as Paracetamol and Ibuprofen to relieve pain and reduce inflammation
- Allow your child to gradually go back to their usual activities as they improve. They should avoid sport and activities until symptoms have completely resolved

Your child should see a doctor if:

- Symptoms are not improving within 1 week or have not completely resolved by 2 weeks
- Pain is increasing despite regular painkillers and rest

Your child should attend A&E if:

- They develop a fever higher than 38C
- Symptoms are worsening
- Develops an obvious swelling or redness on the hip or any part of the leg