

Causes

Muscle tightness or shortening is a common finding in children. It can happen for a variety of reasons including:

- Rapid growth of the long leg bones
- Too much physical activity in one sport / hobby
- Too little physical activity
- A period of immobility or injury

The most common reason for muscles to get tight is related to growth. Children generally have a big growth spurt between the ages of 8-13 in girls and 10-15 in boys where the body develops.

This can cause a shortening of the muscles and make them sensitive or painful for some children.

Paediatric Physiotherapy Service

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This leaflet is available in an alternative format on request.



Muscular Tightness

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How will stretching help?

Research studies have found that a structured stretching programme for the leg muscles for a minimum of **5 days per week** can increase the length of muscles, and reduce pain and the risk of sporting injury.



Do stretches hurt?

Stretches should **NOT** be painful, they may cause a bit of discomfort over the muscle that is being stretched. If you experience pain you should reduce how far you stretch the muscle.

What can I do to help?

An example of common stretches for tight muscles of the leg can be found online by clicking [here](#).

If you are under the Children's Physiotherapy service your Physio will be tell you which stretches are best for you.

Encouraging a wide mix of physical activities and play can also be very useful to help your muscles adapt, for example:

- Swimming
- Cycling
- Play parks
- PE
- Dance



Is there cause for concern?

Many children and young people have tight muscles but experience no pain or restriction in their function. The good news is that the ones that do have discomfort generally respond well to **stretching for a few minutes each day**. This helps to desensitise the muscles and will reduce muscle stiffness.

Pain?

If muscle pain after exercise is a problem, you **should not** stop being active. Instead modify either the activity or the **amount** of activity you are doing and see if this helps. Once you have found your pain free exercise tolerance gradually increase activities in order to allow the muscles time to adjust. Do not do too much activity on one day, spread it throughout the week. This is called 'pacing yourself' and takes time and patience to get right. Don't give up!

Pain management

Aches and pains associated with muscle tightness are usually a result of muscle fatigue or overuse, not damage. Using warmth (a hot water bottle or warm bath) can often be helpful for this as it helps the muscles to relax. You can also speak to your GP or Pharmacist for suggestions on pain relief.

When to seek advice

If you have stretched for at least **5 days a week** for **6 weeks** and your symptoms have not changed you should seek advice from your GP.

Seeing one of our Specialist Physiotherapists may also be helpful so ask your GP for a referral to our team.

Seek advice from your GP if you are experiencing frequent or severe pain.