

Joint Hypermobility Syndrome (Normal Loose Joints)

Definition

- Children with this syndrome have loose joints
- Movement at their joints are excessive
- Joints can be stretched beyond the normal range
- Affects over 10% of children

Health Information

Symptoms

- Usually, there is no pain or other symptoms.
- Joint pains may follow hard sports or play. The pain is from over-stretching of the ligaments around the joints. It is usually mild and doesn't last long.
- Some of these children are "double- jointed" (usually refers to fingers). Many can easily do the "splits" or other extreme postures.
- Slight increased risk for dislocated shoulder or kneecap with injuries.

Diagnosis

The diagnosis is made by the findings below on physical exam:

- Thumb can touch the wrist
- Little finger can be bent backward more than 90 degrees
- Elbow can be bent backward more than 10 degrees
- Knee can also be bent backward more than 10 degrees
- Palms of the hand can rest flat on the floor while bending from the waist. The knees must remain straight.
- Feet are flat with no arch
- A few children with this are double-jointed. This means they can dislocate some of their joints at will.
- Lab tests or X-rays are of no value in making this diagnosis.

Cause

- The ligaments that hold the joints together are loose or lax.
- The elastic (collagen) tissue found in ligaments stretches more than normal. This difference is genetic.
- Loose-jointed findings are often present in other family members.

Care Advice

1. Overview:

- Loose joints are a normal variation, not a disease.
- Pain is not common.
- Here is some care advice that should help.

2. Pain Medicine:

- Pain medicines (Tylenol or ibuprofen) can be taken if the joint hurts.
- The pain is from a stretched ligament.
- Pains should not occur often.

3. **Strength Training:**

- Teenagers who take part in sports can stabilize their joints by strength training.
- Reason: Increases the muscle mass that goes around the joints.
- During weight training, avoid doing full range of motion. Reason: Can overstretch ligaments even more.
- A physical therapist can help design a training program.

4. **Avoid Surgery:**

- There is no medical or surgical treatment that will tighten up the joints.

5. **Stay Active:**

- You do not need to limit your child's sports or play. Your child can participate in all activities.

6. **What to Expect:**

- Overall, the extra looseness of joints is lifelong.
- During the teenage years, it may improve in some children.
- Injuries during sports are slightly increased. They usually involve stretching the loose ligaments around a joint. A common example is a sprained ankle.

Call Your Doctor If

- Joint swelling occurs
- Joint pains become frequent
- You think your child needs to be seen
- Your child becomes worse

Pediatric Care Advice

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