

# THE FOOT AND ANKLE CENTRE

## IDIOPATHIC PAINS OF CHILDHOOD

### INFORMATION LEAFLET

#### **WHAT ARE IDIOPATHIC PAINS?**

Another name may be “*growing pains*” or “*leg aches*”. The child complains of pain, discomfort or aches in their legs. The pain usually occurs late in the day or at night.

#### **AT WHAT AGE DOES IT USUALLY START?**

Leg pains often start about the age of 4 years, but may start/occur in children up to the age of 12 years.

#### **WHAT IS THE CAUSE OF LEG PAINS?**

The word “*idiopathic*” means that the cause is unknown, but it is thought the pain is due to growth. Growth occurs in the bones and the soft tissues (muscles, tendons and ligaments). Bones grow faster and therefore the soft tissues have to ‘catch up’. This can cause stretching and tightness in the muscles which then ache. The pains will settle and may recur during further growth.

#### **WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS?**

Your child may complain of pain in the front of their thighs, in their calves or behind the knees. It is usually felt in both legs.

The pain often occurs at the end of the day or in the night and it may wake them from sleep. By the next morning they are usually pain free and able to continue normal activities.

#### **WHAT DOES THE NURSE PRACTITIONER DO?**

If you are referred to the hospital, the nurse practitioner or doctor will take a history of your child’s pain and examine them to decide a diagnosis. Your child may require an x-ray and a blood test. Usually the history, the examination and the tests do not show any cause for concern and you can be reassured that with time the symptoms will resolve.

#### **WHAT CAN I DO AS A PARENT?**

Rest and simple pain killers such as paracetamol should relieve the symptoms. Normal childhood activities will not do any damage to your child’s legs.

#### **IS A FOLLOW UP APPOINTMENT REQUIRED?**

It is not always necessary to be seen again.

However, in some cases, the nurse practitioner may suggest that you come back for another appointment. You will be asked to keep a diary of your child’s painful episodes. We suggest you write down what seemed to bring them on and what relieved the pain. If the problem persists this may be helpful in deciding the cause.