

## Hypermobility information and advice

Children with **hypermobile joints** have too much movement in their joints. This can occur with just a couple of joints or all joints. A joint is the place on the body where two bones meet. Often even normal activities that put stress on loose joints will irritate them.

For some children hypermobility can cause the symptoms described below. A growth spurt, lack of exercise, illness or an accident can sometimes increase these symptoms:

### Fatigue

Children may complain of a general tiredness and fatigue, because they are working very hard to maintain positions and move due to laxity in the joints. Children may also experience joint or muscle fatigue.

### Pain

Children often experience joint pain, again because their joints and muscles are working harder to stabilise the joint and move throughout the day. Repetitive activities may cause pain due to muscle fatigue and should be paced and regular rest breaks scheduled.

### Difficulty with activities

Children may have difficulties with pencil grip, managing clothes fastenings or manipulating objects. They may be slower to complete activities than their peers.



### Poor coordination

Children may appear less coordinated and have more accidents than their peers. Injuries to joints as a result of a fall, for example, may take longer to heal.

### Knowing where joints are in space

Children may have difficulties feeling where their bodies are without looking as the receptors which send this information to the brain are located in our joints.

## What can I do to help?

Encourage joint protection by demonstrating adapting and practicing the following:

- Try to use larger handled objects rather than narrow ones, which will increase the tension through the hands and stress through the joints. For instance chunky pencils, fatter handled cutlery and an electric rather than standard toothbrush.
- Hold a book, plate or mug in the palms of the hands. If the child is reading for long periods use a book holder. Place iPads on a stand/holder too and use a table or desk rather than holding the tablet in the hands.
- If a child is carrying items, encourage them to make several small trips rather than carrying one very heavy item. When in secondary school it would be beneficial for young people to use a locker rather than carry all of their belongings.

Avoid keeping joints in the same position for a prolonged period of time:

- Don't give joints a chance to become stiff, this can cause more discomfort, keep them moving.
- Gentle exercise and movement throughout the day, even if in pain will help.
- When writing or doing hand work release the grip every 5-10 minutes or more for younger children.
- On long car journeys get out of the car, stretch and move around at least every hour.
- Whilst watching TV get up and move around every half hour.



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### Balance periods of rest and activity during the day:

- Effectively managing the workload throughout the day can help avoid overworking joints.
- Encourage the child to work at a steady moderate pace and avoid rushing.
- Allow rest periods before the child becomes fatigued or sore.
- Alternate light and heavier work throughout the day.
- Take regular stretch breaks.

### Strengthen:

- Encourage regular low impact strengthening activities such as swimming, children's yoga or walking. These are all helpful to improve joint strength.
- Avoid inactivity.
- Being overweight can add extra stress on joints.



### Pain management:

- Heat or ice: warm baths, hot water bottles or heat packs can help relax muscles. Ice can reduce swelling.
- Distraction techniques: focusing on pain will make it feel worse so help the child to keep their mind busy with activities to distract them.
- Visit the GP if the pain isn't manageable

### How can school help and support?

- When the child is at their desk ensure that feet are flat on the floor, thighs and forearms are horizontal and the desk is just below elbow height.
- Using a desk slope can further improve wrist position for writing. If children appear to be slumping in their chair a foam wedge cushion may improve this. Encourage children to sit straighter as although it is hard work, slumping will cause pain.
- If sitting on the carpet or with crossed legs is hard work allow children to sit on a chair or bench. Discourage children sitting in a 'w sit' position on their knees with their bottom between on the floor.
- Children may need to move around a lot and rather than sitting still may fidget. This will reduce the risk of stiffening up and should be allowed.
- Writing may be hard work for children with hypermobile joints. Using chunky pens may help with grip and regular rest breaks are useful to reduce pain. Completing hand warm ups before handwriting may also help.
- Have a plan to allow children to rest if they get over tired at school or in pain.



### PE:

- Unless told otherwise children should participate as much as they can in PE (the curriculum may need to be differentiated).
- This will help keep joints strong to reduce pain
- Make sure they always wear supportive sports shoes with cushioned soles rather than bare feet, if ankles and knees are equally mobile.
- Avoid unnecessary high impact sports if a child is experiencing discomfort.

Additional advice on equipment to try might include pencils and grips, writing boards, cutlery and further assessment for IT.