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## **What is Hypermobility?**

Someone can be described as Hypermobile when they are more flexible than the average person. It can occur in one or more joints and can range in severity. It is common in the general population of children and young adults.

In general hypermobility should be considered a “connective tissue advantage” providing a child is strong and fit. Difficulties mainly occur when the body has become weak and deconditioned.

## **What causes Hypermobility?**

- Can run in the family
- Shape of the bones
- Looser ligaments
- Girls experience more commonly than boys

## **Living with Hypermobility**

Most people won't experience any problems, however some people may experience:

### **Pain and Muscle stiffness**

Pains tend to be worse after exercise – both immediately afterwards and the next day when muscles can be stiff and tender. As a result, affected young people start to avoid exercise. This makes their muscles and bodies less fit. As the muscles in the body become less fit, young people develop worsening symptoms.

### **Clicking Joints**

Sometimes a child may experience 'clicky' joints, which may click repeatedly but this is usually harmless.

## **Fatigue**

If children become unfit they tire more quickly. Their muscles also tire quicker and provide less stability to the hypermobile joint, resulting in excessive movement of the joint that results in pain.

## **Management**

The aim is for young people and families to recognise the importance of carrying out regular exercise to improve muscle tone and strength. This will help to maintain joint stability and ease the symptoms of hypermobility.

### **What can I do?**

**Regular exercise** is important as part of a healthy lifestyle to strengthen muscles and allow better control of flexible joints. There's no reason why people with hypermobile joints shouldn't exercise; in fact it is a crucial part of minimising the symptoms of hypermobility. It improves strength and stamina.

**Swimming** is really beneficial to improve strength and fitness in an environment that allows you free, full movement and supports your body weight.

**Strengthening exercises** should be done regularly, but start gently to avoid straining your joints e.g. Cycling, Pilates or Tai Chi – these are types of low impact activities that don't put much pressure on the joints.

**Maintain a healthy weight** – or to try to return to one. Being underweight will make muscles weaker, whilst being overweight puts more strain on the joints. Both extremes will tend to increase symptoms.

### **Wear supportive shoes or trainers**

**Avoid carrying heavy books** – Ensure you wear a rucksack on both shoulders and store books in a locker instead of carrying them all around.

**Pencil Grips** can help with comfort if you're struggling with writing.

### **What should I not do?**

**Use special equipment** – Wheelchairs and crutches are very unhelpful, as they will tend to make the person weaker and the situation worse.

**Continue certain sports or exercises that cause pain** – These are often high impact or twisting / turning activities. You should stop these activities until it's clear why you have pain. With the right strengthening exercises it may be possible to return to these activities at an appropriate time without increasing pain.

**Avoid slouching at a desk** – use the chair for support with feet flat on the floor

**Avoid W sitting** –sitting on the floor with your bottom between your feet

**Physiotherapy** – The main aim of physiotherapy is to enable a child and family to become confident to self-manage symptoms.

This is achieved by providing:

- Education
- Reassurance
- Advice on pain management
- Advice on improving general fitness
- Restoring muscle strength and function

## **Resources**

<http://www.nhs.uk/Conditions/Jointhypermobility/Pages/Introduction.aspx>

<http://hypermobility.org/>

<http://patient.info/health/hypermobility-syndrome-leaflet>

<http://www.arthritisresearchuk.org/arthritis-information/conditions/joint-hypermobility.aspx>

<http://www.nhs.uk/Livewell/fitness/Pages/physical-activity-guidelines-for-young-people.aspx>