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Limb Pain Syndromes

Version of 2016

7. Transient Synovitis

7.1 What is it?

Transient synovitis is a mild inflammation (small amount of fluid within the joint), of unknown cause, of the hip joint that resolves by itself leaving no damage.

7.2 How common is it?

It is the most common cause of hip pain in paediatrics. It affects 2 to 3% of children aged 3-10 years. It is more common in boys (one girl for every 3/4 boys).

7.3 What are the main symptoms?

The main symptoms are hip pain and a limp. Hip pain may be present as pain in the groin, upper thigh or occasionally in the knee, usually of sudden onset. The most common manifestation is a child awakening with a limp or refusing to walk.

7.4 How is it diagnosed?

The physical examination is characteristic: a limp with decreased and painful hip motion in an afebrile child older than 3 years of age, who otherwise does not appear ill. Both hips are affected in 5% of cases. Hip x-rays generally have normal findings and are not usually required. In contrast, hip ultrasound is very useful in detecting hip synovitis.

7.5 How can we treat it?

The basis of the treatment is rest, which should be proportionate to the degree of pain. Non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs can help to decrease pain and inflammation. The condition usually resolves after an average of 6-8 days.

7.6 What is the prognosis?

Prognosis is excellent with full recovery in 100% of children (it is transient by definition). If symptoms persist for more than 10 days, a different disease should be considered. It is not uncommon to develop new episodes of transient synovitis; these episodes are usually milder and shorter than the first one.