

Patellofemoral Pain Syndrome

Patellofemoral pain syndrome, sometimes called “runner’s knee,” is the most common cause of chronic knee pain. It is an “overuse” syndrome, caused by too much activity of the knee, especially in sports involving running and jumping. Simple treatments are usually effective, such as reducing sports activity and using exercises to strengthen the leg muscles.

What is patellofemoral pain syndrome?

Patellofemoral pain syndrome is pain involving the kneecap, or patella. It most often occurs in teenage athletes but can happen in younger children as well. Although patellofemoral pain syndrome is not a serious condition, physical activity may have to be decreased and exercises done to strengthen the leg muscles before their knee pain goes away.

What does it look like?

- Pain in the front part of the knee in the area around the kneecap.
- Pain develops gradually, with no apparent injury.
- Pain is usually worse in one knee than the other.
- Pain is worse when going up stairs, after squatting or running, or after sitting for a long time.
- Occasional swelling can occur.

What causes patellofemoral pain syndrome?

- Patellofemoral pain syndrome is most often caused by too much physical activity. It may occur in runners, basketball players, and volleyball players. No particular injury causes the pain. Instead, pain develops gradually, over time.
- Weakness of the upper leg muscles—especially the front of the thigh (quadriceps)—seems to play a role in this type of pain. That’s why strengthening of these muscles is an important part of treatment.

What are some possible complications of patellofemoral pain syndrome?

Proper treatment and rehabilitation are needed to protect the knee against future injury, especially in athletes.

Although patellofemoral pain syndrome is the most common cause of knee pain, there are many other possible reasons for knee pain in young athletes, such as joint dislocation or arthritis. Your child needs medical evaluation to make sure the cause of the pain is identified and treated.

What puts your child at risk of patellofemoral pain syndrome?

This kind of knee pain is most common in teenage athletes involved in running or jumping sports.

How is patellofemoral pain syndrome treated?

Treatment may include:

- *Reduced physical activity.* It may be necessary to reduce or temporarily stop the activity causing your child’s knee pain.
- *Medications.* Pain relievers such as ibuprofen or other nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs) may help.
- *Exercises.* Exercises to strengthen the quadriceps muscles (front of the thigh) may be useful.
- *Bracing.* A brace or sleeve may be used to support the knee joint and surrounding area.
- *Rehabilitation.* The doctor may recommend that your child undergo a formal rehabilitation or a physical therapy program if symptoms persist or are severe.

When should I call your office?

Call our office if:

- Your child has continued knee pain despite reduced activity and other treatments for patellofemoral pain syndrome.
- Your child starts limping.
- Your child develops other knee symptoms, such as “locking” or “giving out.”
- Your child develops severe swelling or pain in the knee.

