



# Hypermobility Advice Sheet

## What does it mean if my child is 'hypermobile'?

A child can be described as being hypermobile when they are more flexible than the average person. They are often referred to as being 'double-jointed' and often have a greater range of movement in one joint or more of their joints.

Hypermobility is usually normal and commonly seen in young children, with 5-15%\* of all UK school children being classed as hypermobile. It should improve with age as your child's strength and co-ordination develops. However some children will remain hypermobile in their joints, but this does not mean that it will cause them any problems in the future.

## What causes hypermobility in the joints?

The connective tissues found in places such as joints, ligaments and tendons can be thinner and more elastic in young people causing their joints to be more flexible.

As your child gets older, their joints are likely to naturally stiffen and become more stable. There are many things that can be done to help your child

This booklet suggests some helpful advice and exercises for you and your child.

## What you might see in your child:

Having hypermobility, flexible joints or being 'extra-bendy' is not unusual in children. This can present in many ways. Children with hypermobility may:

- Have taken time to meet their milestones e.g. learning to sit and walk.
- Be considered 'clumsy'
- Complain of pains in their legs and/or arms, specifically around the joints.
- Find activities like riding a bike, running and jumping hard and tire easily.
- Find fine motor skills such as doing up clothing (buttons and zips), opening food items and manipulating small objects difficult or tiring.
- Complain that their hands are sore or tired when handwriting.
- Sleep may be difficult as their muscles and joints may be aching from a day's hard work at keeping in balance.

## What it might affect:

Some activities may be particularly difficult, below are some examples:

- **Handwriting** - this activity may be hard due to the need for controlled movement in the arm, wrist and fingers. Holding a pencil with the right amount of pressure to produce controlled marks on the page is a skill that takes time.
- **Riding a bike** - this activity requires coordination of the legs including the knee and hip joints. This could be difficult if your child has hypermobility in these areas as they may move beyond the 'normal' range of movement.
- **Activities of daily living** - these are different things we all do every day such as:



**brushing our teeth**



**getting dressed**



**making food or drink.**



With hypermobility activities that require good finger manipulation such as doing up buttons and holding a tooth brush may be hard. Controlling fingers that have extra movement is hard work! Activities that we may find easy can be difficult and cause pain, tiredness and frustration.

## What I can do to help...

It is important to give your child opportunities to build strength and stability in their joints and muscles as this will protect against any injury. Having a **balance** of activities will support this, for example:

**Swimming, walking and riding a bike** are great activities and can be part of your daily routine.

- Encourage good walking, standing and sitting **postures** is important.
- **Regular breaks and pacing:** being active is great but allowing time for joints to rest is important as well as conserving energy for other activities in the day.



- **Footwear:** good fitted, fastened shoes e.g. laces or Velcro will support your child's ankle joint. Avoid high-heeled shoes or slip-ons.

- **Sleep:** If sleeping is difficult having a regular bedtime routine will help and using relaxation techniques before this time will support your child to sleep.



- **Handwriting:** your child may benefit from a pencil grip or a modified pencil or pen which can aid grasping the pencil and may make handwriting less painful and tiring.
- Think about **protecting joints.** Encourage your child to use larger joints instead of smaller joints in daily activities i.e. to carry books place them on your forearms instead of using hands instead of using hands.

## What should my child avoid?

- **Sports which cause pain:** these are often high impact and contact sports which involve a lot of twisting and turning. They are likely to put a lot of strain the joints and the surrounding tissue.
- **Jumping onto hard surfaces from a height:** it is hard to control hypermobile joints on landing and they may be damaged by being overstretched.
- **Too much exercise in a day:** Your child should avoid doing too much exercise in one day and should spread it out throughout the week. This will allow joints to rest and will gradually increase their strength.
- **'W-Sitting':** (kneeling with their bottom between their knees) This can cause leg alignment problems due to abnormal forces put through the joints.
- Avoid carrying heavy bags on one shoulder and avoid carrying unnecessary weight eg. Books.
- **Becoming overweight:** This will add more stress to your child's muscles and joints.
- **Avoid slouching:** Make sure their feet can touch the floor when they're sitting and that they're well supported.

If your child experiences pain during exercise they should not stop doing exercise all together as this will actually have more of a negative effect on your child.

## Strategies for school and every day life:

### **Handwriting:**

- ✎ Your child may benefit from a thicker pen/pencil.
- ✎ A pencil grip may also help to encourage correct finger placement and make it more comfortable.
- ✎ Encourage breaks and allow your child to stretch they're fingers.
- ✎ You could suggest to teachers to provide hand-outs to reduce the amount of hand-writing.

### **Carrying a school bag:**

- ✎ Encourage your child to plan ahead so they only carry what is necessary for the day!
- ✎ Encourage a sturdy rucksack with two straps that are fastened well!
- ✎ Make use of lockers in school to store any spare books or items.

### **Dressing:**

- Consider using elastic laces or Velcro instead of using ordinary laces.
- If buttons are difficult your child could leave the top button on shirt undone and take it off like a jumper.