

Slipped capital femoral epiphysis (SCFE)



What is SCFE?

Slipped capital femoral epiphysis (SCFE) is a hip problem. It happens when the top (epiphysis) of the thighbone (femur) slips from the hip joint through the growth plate.

- This can happen in 1 or both hips.
- The cause is not always known.
- It is most common in children between 8 to 15 years old.
- It often happens during a growth spurt.
- There are 2 types of SCFE - stable and unstable.

What is stable SCFE?

Children with stable SCFE can walk with or without crutches. Symptoms can happen quickly or over time. Symptoms include:

- Pain in the groin, thigh or knee. Pain is not always in the hip.
- Decreased movement in the hip.
- Walking with the foot turned out.
- Cannot run or play sports.
- Trouble bending over.
- Limping. The affected leg may look shorter.

What is unstable SCFE?

Children with unstable SCFE are not able to walk, even with crutches. Unstable SCFE often happens after a fall or sports injury. A fall can turn stable SCFE into unstable SCFE. Your child should not try to move the leg. Moving the leg can make it worse. Symptoms include:

- Pain similar to a broken bone.
- Cannot move the injured leg.

What can I expect at the visit?

An orthopedic doctor will talk with you and your child about their symptoms. The doctor may watch your child walk. They most often order X-rays of your child's hips and thighs.

What can I expect if my child has SCFE?

If your child has SCFE, they need treatment right away. This most often means surgery. After surgery, your child will have follow-up visits to check their recovery and watch for complications.

In case of an urgent concern or emergency, call 911 or go to the nearest emergency department right away.

Slipped capital femoral epiphysis (SCFE), continued

What is the follow-up schedule?

Stable SCFE:

- 2 to 6 weeks after surgery
- 3 months
- 6 months
- 1 year

Unstable SCFE:

- 2 weeks after surgery
- 6 weeks
- Every 3 months for 2 years

What happens at follow-up visits?

Your child's doctor will check both hips. They will:

- Take X-rays.
- Ask questions about life since the surgery.
- Check for pain, limping, and movement in the hips and legs.

When should I call the doctor?

After surgery, call the orthopedic doctor if your child has:

- Fever of 101°F or higher without other signs of sickness.
- Increased redness, swelling, tenderness, pain or warmth at the surgery sites.
- Drainage or bad smell at the surgery sites.
- Open areas along the incision (cut) line.
- Pain that does not get better with pain medicine.
- Numbness or tingling in the legs or feet.
- Any questions or concerns about how your child looks or feels.

This teaching sheet contains general information only. Talk with your child's doctor or a member of your child's healthcare team about specific care of your child.

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