

Fact Sheet



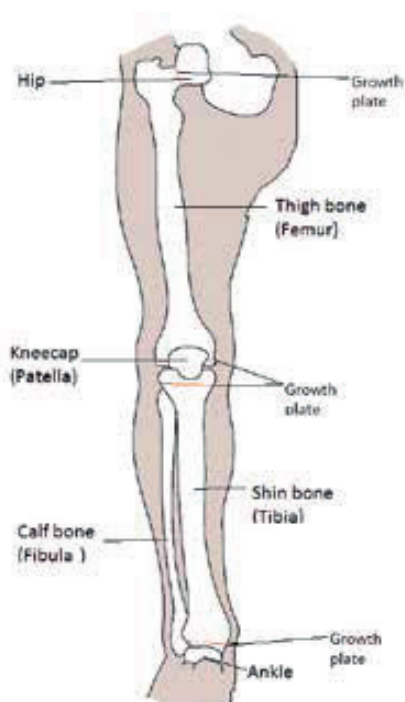
Leg Length Difference

What is a Leg Length Difference?

Anisomelia is a condition best describing the inequality between paired limbs; in this factsheet we are referring to the condition more commonly known as Short Leg Syndrome or Leg Length Difference / Discrepancy (LLD).

It may be a surprising fact to know that one in four people walk around with two legs of different lengths, all be it miniscule enough not to notice. In babies, a variance or deficiency, may be diagnosed during the antenatal stage or at birth. For a number of parents, however, an obvious leg length difference may only be evidenced as their child begins to crawl then walk.

There are three main long bones in the leg: the longest being the femur (thigh bone) and the shorter two in the lower leg, the tibia and fibula: the fibula being the thinnest one.



Lower limb deficiency, leading to leg length difference, can arise due to a range of conditions where the bones in the leg are shorter, incorrectly formed, or absent at birth. Other cases do not show until soon after birth or even later, when a child is learning to walk.

Why does it happen?

It is usually a deficiency in the lower limbs which leads to a leg length difference, is congenital (present at birth), or could arise due to a range of conditions such as a fracture along a growth plate, or even after hip replacement. In actual fact, in most cases conditions that actually cause leg length difference are usually unknown. Some conditions can, occasionally, be passed on in families and sometimes can be associated with other conditions and syndromes. A thorough examination and diagnostic tests will detect the presence or absence of other such conditions in each individual case.

Diagnosis

Many cases are picked up at routine antenatal scans, around 12 or 20 weeks of pregnancy, when the femur length is measured and, other limb abnormalities can be visually checked for. It can also be diagnosed after illness or injury. Other cases do not show until soon after birth or even later, when a child is learning to walk.



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Helpline number
+44 (0) 1925 750 271

email : info@steps-charity.org.uk

The Leading Charity for Lower Limb Conditions

Registered charity in England and Wales (1094343), Scotland (SC049759) and also operating in Northern Ireland. A company limited by guarantee, registered in England and Wales company number 04379997.

Registered office: The White House, Wilderspool Business Park, Greenalls Avenue, Warrington, WA4 6HL.

Treatment

Treatment depends on the condition and exact form and severity. Consultants will assess each child individually and work with your family to decide on the best option.

Further investigations such as x-rays and an MRI following birth may be used to guide treatment and options available. Treatment can either be done surgically or non-surgically. Non-surgical treatment tends to be favoured if there is a small discrepancy of about 1 inch or less difference. This would require lifting the heel of the shortened leg with a heel lift or insole, or even a specially designed shoe.

How will it affect my child?

The emotional and physical effects of living with - and having treatment for - a leg length difference will vary with the type of treatment, from child to child and family to family.

As the many achievements of the children whose families we have supported demonstrate, it is no barrier to success and the most important thing is to always encourage full participation in whatever your child shows an interest in.

You'll be starting to arrange medical appointments, both routine and those associated with your child's condition. Take a relative or friend with you, as an extra pair of ears, and bring a notebook, so you can record any information and refer to it when you need to.

It's also helpful to write down any questions you may have beforehand - as sleep deprivation and exhaustion begin to kick in, your ability to remember everything will be impaired. Try to make notes of any new terminology you may hear and don't be afraid to ask questions if you come across something you don't understand.

Sources of support

Our helpline **+44 (0) 1925 750 271** is open from 9am until 5pm weekdays, for any questions you may have.

Medical enquiries to be passed to our panel of NHS consultants.

Email info@steps-charity.org.uk with a specific request or fill in a contact form on our website. The Steps closed Facebook Group is a friendly, safe way of discussing worries, sharing tips and finding emotional support.

Other Steps fact sheets are available on the website, focussing on the specific conditions relating to leg length difference.

Our Family Contact service identifies someone else who has been through similar and who's happy to talk about their experiences, on a one-to-one basis, to offer support and encouragement. For families also affected by limb difference of the arms, reach.org.uk are very helpful.

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