

Benign Hypermobility Joint Syndrome

The Benign hypermobility Joint Syndrome is a condition where joints move beyond the normal range expected for a particular joint. The joint hypermobility syndrome is considered a benign condition. It is estimated that 10%-15% of normal children have hypermobile joints or joints that can move beyond the normal range of motion. Hypermobile joints are sometimes referred to as "loose joints," and those affected are referred to as being "double jointed."

Benign hypermobility joint syndrome (BHJS) is a generally considered a hereditary disorder of the connective tissues (ligaments) that results in joints becoming loose (hypermobile) throughout the body. Although some degree of hypermobility in children is normal, individuals with BHJS may have persistent laxity (loose ligaments), resulting in long-term problems, such as pain and joint instability. BHJS can be a limiting disorder; physical therapists help those with the syndrome develop strategies to increase joint stability, reduce pain, and improve function.

What Is The Cause of benign hypermobility joint syndrome?

Hypermobile joints tend to be inherited in specific genes passed on by parents to their children. It is felt that these certain genes predispose to the development of hypermobile joints. As a result, there is a tendency of the condition to run in families. Genes that are responsible for the production of collagen, an important protein that helps to glue tissues together, are suspected of playing a role.

The real issue is the ligament. If the ligament is lax, the joint will be less well supported, and could also become lax or loose. Weak ligaments may be over-stretched and joints go beyond their normal range of movement. Ligament laxity could be due to increased collagen or elastin in the ligament.

Joint hypermobility is also a feature of a rare, inherited, more significant medical condition called Ehlers-Danlos syndrome (EDS), which is characterized by weakness of the connective tissues of the body. Joint hypermobility is commonly seen in people with Down's syndrome and in people with Marfan syndrome.

What are benign hypermobility joint syndrome symptoms?

Because the joints are capable of excessive motion in people with the joint hypermobility syndrome, they are susceptible to injury. Symptoms of the joint hypermobility syndrome include pain in the knees, fingers, hips, and elbows. There is a higher incidence of joint dislocation and sprains of involved joints. Scoliosis (curvature of the spine) occurs more frequently in people with hypermobile joints and can lead to back pain. Joint hypermobility tends to decrease with aging as we become naturally less flexible.

Also, signs of the syndrome are the ability to place the palms of the hands on the floor with the knees fully extended, hyperextension of the knee or elbow beyond 10 degrees, and the ability to touch the thumb to the forearm.

Treating Benign Hypermobility Joint Syndrome

Often joint hypermobility causes no symptoms and requires no treatment. Many individuals with joint hypermobility syndrome improve in adulthood. Nevertheless, treatments are customized for each individual based on their particular manifestations. Joint pains can be relieved by medications for pain or inflammation. Proper physical fitness exercise should be designed to avoid injury to joints. Home remedies include home exercises and acetaminophen (Tylenol), as needed. Sometimes physical therapy can help with rehabilitation of injured areas and can be especially helpful to prevent reinjury.

Physical and manual therapists play a vital role in providing treatment strategies and activities that help people experiencing BHJS improve their joint stability. Your physical therapist will develop an individualized plan of care to treat your condition. Your treatments may include:

- **Muscle Strengthening:** Muscles also provide stability to joints. Your physical therapist will develop strategies to increase the strength of key muscles that aid in joint stability.
- **Balance and Proprioceptive Activities:** Your physical therapist may work with you on treatment strategies to improve your balance and coordination.
- **Orthotics/Taping/Bracing:** Your physical therapist may provide ankle taping, a custom orthotic, or bracing if a joint is deemed too loose, to help make it less susceptible to further injury.
- **Manual Therapy:** Because pain is a common complaint of people with this disorder, your physical therapist may apply gentle hands-on treatments to reduce your discomfort and gently stimulate the nerves in your joints.

Since joint hypermobility syndrome is inherited, it is not preventable. Nevertheless, when joint hypermobility syndrome causes symptoms, prevention of injury and pain is possible by avoiding trauma and using appropriate treatments.

BHJS Top Tip:

If you have signs of BHJS you should be very careful when stretching muscles, and you should avoid self-manipulation where you click or crack your own joints.

Repeated manipulation or cracking of your own joints can lead to chronic pain. Even though when you first crack the joint, it will feel like a relief. Repeated and regular manipulation or adjustment is not recommended as it will further increase the hypermobility.

Manipulation by a manipulative therapist, osteopath or chiropractor is usually targeted to a stiff joint and when performed by an expert can provide relief.