Mr Andrew Lavender
Consultant Knee Surgeon

Osgood – Schlatters Disease

This is where adolescents get pain at the front of their knee when doing sporting activities. The pain gets better with rest. Over time a bump appears at the top of the shin bone (tibial tuberosity) where the pain is felt.

The bump on the top of the front of the shin bone (tibial tuberosity) is where the tendon (patella tendon) from the knee cap (patella) attaches onto the shin bone (tibia). When children are growing the bump has a growing area (apophyses) under where the tendon attaches. In some children, usually the active ones, repeated use causes inflammation in the growing area. The inflammation causes pain when the knee is used. This is worse in when doing running and jumping activities. Rest settles the inflammation and the pain goes away.

The growing area (apophyses) tends to break up and get bigger with time. This means that the bump at the top of the shin bone gets bigger and more prominent. X-rays taken of the knee may show “loose pieces of bone”. These are not fracture / breaks in the bone.

With time the growing area stops growing and becomes part of the shin bone. Some of the fragments of the growing area may remain separate as “loose bodies” on X-ray. When the growing area fuses to the rest of the shin bone there is no where left for the inflammation and so the pain goes away.

Treatment

This is aimed at the symptoms. When the knee is painful, rest is required. Anti-inflammatory tablets or gels may be of benefit, as may ice. When the knee is pain free it can be used as normal.

Prominent bumps on the front of the knee or “loose bodies” on X-rays should be left alone. Surgery to remove loose bodies does not guarantee removing pain or reducing the size of the bump. Reducing the size of the bump is dangerous as to get to the bony bump you have to peel off the tendon. If the tendon comes off the bone then your knee will not work properly afterwards. Also surgery is always associated with swelling afterwards and so attempts to reduce the size of the bump are very disappointing.