

What is a Limb Length Discrepancy

A limb length discrepancy is when one arm or leg is longer than the other arm or leg. A limb length difference may occur because of a congenital condition (present at birth), or it may be acquired as a result of an injury, infection or other disease process. In many cases the difference is small and does not interfere with function or cause discomfort. In others it may require treatment.

Leg Length Discrepancy:

Many people have small differences in leg lengths that occur normally and do not interfere with function or cause discomfort. Larger differences can cause problems with activities of daily living and may cause back and hip issues in the long term. A detailed physical examination and x-ray imaging will help determine the underlying cause and guide a discussion with your physician regarding treatment options.

Diagnosing a leg length discrepancy:

Your physician performs a detailed physical examination which will include specific attention to the length difference and the motion of all the joints in the leg and foot. This exam will guide what x-rays are necessary. Typically, a full-length x-ray of both legs is taken with the patient in the standing position. This will allow an accurate measurement of the bones and an evaluation of other associated limb deformities.

Treating a leg length discrepancy:

Your physician will discuss treatment options according to the location(s) of the discrepancy(ies), involvement of the surrounding joints in the leg, underlying cause of the discrepancy, and the magnitude of the limb length difference. Some treatment options that may be discussed include shoe lifts, targeted and timed stoppage of growth plates in the longer leg (epiphysiodesis), limb lengthening, and limb shortening. Ultimately, the best treatment options for your child will be determined by a process of shared decision making. This process takes into consideration your child's unique clinical picture and tailors the treatment plans to meet your goals for your child.