

Management of handwriting problems for children with joint hypermobility requires correct diagnosis by paediatric occupational therapists

Alison Wesley

The Children's Hospital at Westmead, New South Wales, Australia

Introduction: Joint hypermobility is a term describing synovial joints with a range of motion beyond that which is considered normal for an individual's age, gender and ethnic status. In most cases joint hypermobility is asymptomatic, however a small percentage of people with joint hypermobility experience musculoskeletal symptoms such as pain, which may impact upon occupational performance. Joint hypermobility combined with musculoskeletal symptoms is often referred to as symptomatic hypermobility.

Aims & Approach: Children with handwriting difficulties are a major source of referrals to paediatric occupational therapists. These children may present with any combination of low tone, coordination difficulties and joint hypermobility. Misdiagnosis of these conditions can result in prescription of contraindicated therapy techniques. Greater awareness is required by clinicians in order to be able to differentiate between children with low tone and those with joint hypermobility syndrome in order to ensure the correct indications for management are followed.

Conclusion: A background to the pathophysiology of joint hypermobility and its implications for occupational therapy practice will be presented. The focus of this paper will be to inform clinicians of the impact of joint hypermobility syndrome on handwriting skills and to introduce current management strategies used by occupational therapists both in the literature and in clinical practice.