

# Hamstring Lengthening

## Why does my child need this surgery?

Hamstring lengthening surgery is recommended when:

- very tight muscle tone (spasticity) has caused a child's hamstring muscles behind the knee to become overly tight. Children who are walkers may have to walk in a crouch because the legs won't straighten.
- the hamstrings are tight from sitting most of the day. This is a common problem for children in wheelchairs. Without surgery, they may not be able to straighten their legs when they lie down. They may also have to sit hunched-over because of the tightness in their hamstrings.
- the hips have become unstable because of tight hamstrings.

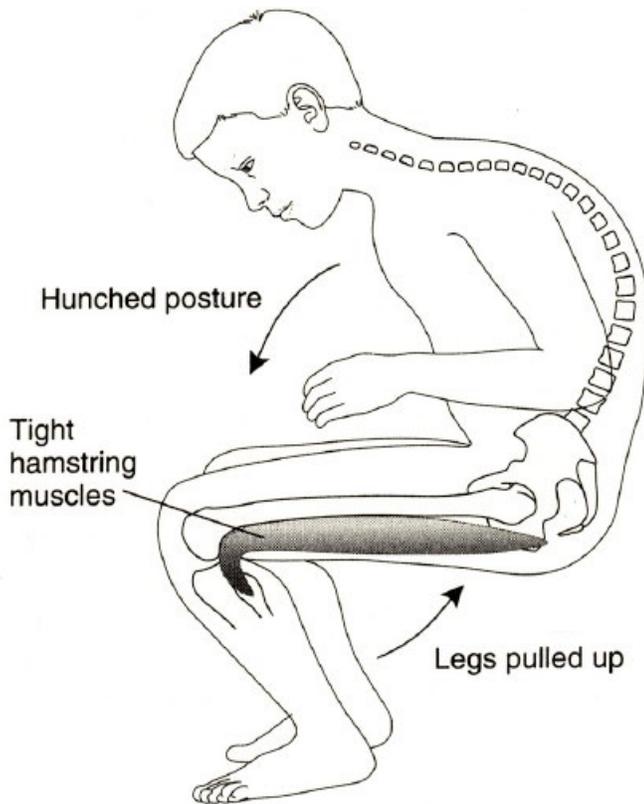


## What are the incisions like?

Each cut in the skin is about two inches long. Incisions can be behind the knee or in the groin, depending on why the child needed surgery. For a child who walks in a crouch, incisions are usually behind the knee. For a child with seating problems, incisions may be behind the knee or behind the buttocks.

## What happens after surgery?

Your child will be placed in a knee immobilizer. This is a removable foam splint with metal supports (stays) that holds the knee straight and the hamstrings stretched. If this is your child's only surgery, they will probably go home after one night in the hospital.



## What happens during this surgery?

One technique is to cut the bands of tendons in the hamstring and let the muscle stretch out. Another approach is to make a "Z"-shaped cut in the tendons, slide the ends apart, then suture (stitch) them into a longer shape. The tendons heal in this new, longer position.

## Will my child be able to walk during this time?

Yes. But your child may need a walker or crutches at first.

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## Will my child be able to ride in the car with the immobilizers?

When your child is in the car, you may remove the immobilizers and let the knees bend.

## How long will the immobilizers stay on?

In the beginning, your child will probably be told to wear them for two hours on and two hours off. Your doctor will let you know when it's time to switch to night only — and when they are no longer needed.

## Will my child have pain?

Yes, your child will need pain relievers and muscle relaxants at first. Our staff is trained to help make patients as comfortable as possible. Once you go home, please call the office if pain is a problem or the pain medication your child's doctor prescribed causes side effects.

## Will my child need physical therapy?

Yes. Therapists will work with your child in the hospital and give you a prescription to continue therapy as an outpatient after you go home. Therapy will focus on stretching, strengthening and walking (if your child is a walker). If hamstring lengthening is the only procedure your child had, therapy may begin right away. It will continue as long as your child needs help. Success depends on your child's willingness and ability to work with their therapists.

A Nemours social worker will help you arrange therapy. You can help by asking your insurance provider in advance what your coverage is for physical therapy. Please try to do this before surgery if you can.

## When will my child need to return to see the doctor?

In most cases, your child will be scheduled to see the doctor four weeks after surgery.

## When will my child be able to return to school and the school bus?

Most children are comfortable enough to return to school after two weeks, but this varies. If your child had several procedures at the same time, it may take longer. A lot depends on the length of the bus ride and whether the school will help make the school day easier.

## How long will it be until my child has completely recovered?

Every child is different. As a general rule, it takes three to six months to fully recover from hamstring lengthening surgery. If your child had other procedures at the same time, it may take longer.

## Will this surgery ever need to be repeated?

Possibly. If a child is young when the hamstrings need to be lengthened, there is a strong chance that they will need the same procedure again during their teen years.

## What are the possible complications with this surgery?

Infections can happen with any surgery. Most are minor, treatable and do not delay recovery. A rare but much more serious complication is an injury to major nerve and blood vessels in the leg. When the procedure is done a second time, the risk is higher — but still very low. Your child's surgeon is aware of the risks and will be very careful.