



PODIATRY

Footscope

A foot health message from
Bayswater Allied Health

Kids and flat feet



Flatfoot is not an uncommon condition in children and is noticeable by the very flat look of the foot when your child is standing or walking, without the noticeable arch and gap at the inside of the foot between the bottom of the foot and the ground that can be seen in a normally developed foot. In a lot of cases, flatfoot is inherited from the parents, or is simply caused by underdeveloped arches. Arches of the foot aren't fully developed until the age of 10, so your child's flat feet will most likely resolve themselves as the arches develop. In very young children, feet may not actually be flat at all. The chubby, cushioned feet of a toddler can look like they are flat, when in fact the arches are just disguised by all of that toddler padding!

There are two types of flatfoot — flexible and rigid. A podiatrist will diagnose the type of flatfoot your child has by carefully examining the foot and ankle, checking how easily the joints move and by asking your child to stand on tiptoe or to dangle their feet in the air off the side of a chair or exam table. If an arch appears when they stand on their toes, they have flexible flatfoot; if no arch appears they have rigid flatfoot. Flexible flatfoot doesn't usually need any specific treatment and will often resolve on its own as your child's arches develop. In some cases, flexible flatfoot can be caused by a shortened Achilles tendon, which will need treatment, involving stretching of the tendon.

Rigid flatfoot in children born with joint problems or bones fused together will require treatment to correct the problem. Rigid flatfoot is more serious and can cause a lot of problems requiring medical attention and — in a small number of serious cases usually combined with a shortened Achilles — surgery may be required. Other medical conditions including cerebral palsy, muscular dystrophy and spina bifida mean that your child is more likely to have problems with flat feet, and we recommend consultation.

The more-common flexible flatfoot requires no treatment, however the condition can cause uneven pressure on your child's feet, leading to a tendency for the feet to roll inwards. This can put a lot of extra stress on muscles, tendons and ligaments of the foot as they work harder to provide support and your child may complain of pain in the ankles, the outside of the foot, calf, knees, hips or back. We can suggest the fitting of soft orthotics to support the feet and ease foot and other associated pain.

Ten tips for looking after your child's feet

Problems with your child's feet can be problems for life if not treated early. Foot conditions can lead to knee, hip and back pain that can have serious consequences on your child's development and posture. Bones and joints in children are constantly growing and are not fully developed until adulthood. As such, incorrect movement patterns and untreated foot conditions can cause young and supple bones and joints to develop abnormally with potential for lifelong problems not only for your child's feet, but also for other parts of the body that are thrown out of balance to compensate for foot injuries.

Here are our top ten tips for healthy kids feet.

Barefoot crawlers: babies don't have any bones in their feet and all 26 bones present in an adult foot grow throughout childhood. Allowing babies to remain barefoot while crawling enables full contact between their skin and the ground, which promotes a faster understanding of balance and flexibility, without being constricted by shoes or socks. Of course, make sure there are no hazards around that could injure bare feet.

Shoes for support: when your child starts to walk it's a good idea to get professionally fitted shoes to protect the feet and support those wobbly first steps.

Properly fitted shoes: casual shoes and fashion shoes can have terrible effects on a child's feet. They lack support, have very thin soles and are made of synthetic fibers that don't allow young feet to breathe. Try to get shoes that fit both the length and width of your child's feet, and that are made of

breathable canvas or leather uppers.

Properly fitted socks: sock sizes should change as frequently as shoe sizes. Tiny feet without bones can be squeezed into just about anything, but with terrible repercussions for your child's development. Make sure socks aren't too tight and that they don't bunch up inside shoes, causing blisters and other injuries that lead to changed walking patterns.

Regularly measure growing feet: little feet become big feet quickly and your child can wind up wearing tight fitting shoes before you've had a chance to even think about buying new ones! Measure your child's feet regularly to be sure they are wearing shoes that fit properly. As well as causing pain and discomfort, ill-fitting shoes can cause bones and joints to develop incorrectly.

Look at shoe wear: the way your child's shoes show wear and tear can give you a good indication of incorrect walking patterns or postural problems. Excessive wear and tear, for example, from the outside edge to the inside of the shoe or around the heel are indicative of problems that should be checked out.

Alternate shoes: try to put young feet into different shoes so each pair has time to dry out if sweaty or damp between wears.

Wash, dry, talc: wash little feet daily in soap and water and dry thoroughly. Problems can develop if moisture is left between toes, so it's a good idea to apply a little talcum powder to those areas to soak up any remaining water.



Trim: keep toenails trimmed as long nails can cause injuries inside shoes. Be sure not to cut nails too close to the skin as this can lead to ingrown toenails that can become infected.

Keep an eye out: children rarely complain about painful or injured feet, so inspect feet regularly to be sure they are healthy. Any injuries or infections should be treated, to avoid lasting damage.

Toe Walking

It's common for children under three to walk on their toes without letting their heels touch the ground and kids usually develop a normal heel-to-toe walking pattern after the age of two or three. Parents sometimes panic when they notice their children walking exclusively on their toes, as toe walking can indicate more serious medical conditions. For most children, however, toe walking is a developmental phase (often hereditary) that will sort itself out over time and with some simple steps to encourage a heel-to-toe walking pattern.

In more serious cases, and for children who don't develop a normal walking pattern after the age of two or three years, toe walking can be an indication of underlying medical conditions including cerebral palsy, muscular dystrophy and autism, for which diagnosis is critical, and can also be attributed to shortened Achilles tendons. If your child continues to walk on their toes after the age of five, do seek medical advice, but keep in mind that for most kids there

is nothing to worry about, and the toe walking may simply have become a habit.

As long as your child is developing normally, toe walking is a problem that will usually fix itself. While walking on toes isn't a big deal in terms of your child's development, it is important to encourage a normal heel-to-toe walking pattern to avoid causing unnecessary damage to the feet. Walking without touching the heels to the ground has obvious effects on stability, and so can increase the risk of ankle injuries and general lack of balance. The tendons, ligaments and muscles supporting the feet have to work quite hard to provide extra stability and can cause repetitive strain injuries as well as a greater tendency to fall over in the playground!

Stretching exercises are great for easing tight muscles and tendons that may be causing a bit of pain. Stretching can also help to lengthen the Achilles tendon and the calf muscles, as these can become shortened through toe walking. Ask your podiatrist for advice, they can give you details of stretches that can be done in front of the television or reading a book, so your kids will hardly be aware that they're doing them.

Bayswater Allied Health

254 Beechboro Road
Morley 6062

admin@bayswateralliedhealth.com
08 93781288