



Shoes and Your Kids

Children's feet may be small but unless adults consider the specific needs of young walkers, problems for those children may loom large. Shoes will protect children's feet, but if fit incorrectly, they can do more harm than good. A few simple guidelines for determining proper size, type of shoe and professional care can help you get the right fit for your growing children. When a child first begins to walk, shoes are not necessary indoors. Shoes may even impede a child's development and progress. Allowing toddlers to go barefoot or to wear just socks helps the foot to grow normally and to develop its musculature and strength, as well as the grasping action of toes. When walking outside however, babies' feet should be protected in lightweight, flexible footwear made from natural materials. The feet of young children may be unstable because of muscle problems that may make walking difficult or uncomfortable. A thorough examination by a podiatrist may detect any underlying defects or conditions that may require immediate treatment or consultation. Once the child is ready for shoes, to get the right size, make 1/2" space between the child's longest toe and the end of the shoe. Remember that it's natural for small children to curl their toes when trying on new shoes. To get the right width, see that you can pinch a small amount of the shoe upper across the top of the foot. If you have a toddler, check shoe fit every three or four months since children's feet grow rapidly.

The type of shoe you pick is important to ensure proper fit. Shoes should have thin, soft soles and be flexible enough to bend very easily across the ball of the foot. Flexible soles help children develop their sense of balance. Shop at stores with experienced sales people that feature a wide selection of footwear styles, sizes and widths. Do not assume a given size will fit the same for different brands of shoes. Avoid man-made materials because they limit breathability. Hand me down clothes are great—but not shoes. Second hand shoes can create improper balance because they may have worn out unevenly by the previous owner.

Some foot problems require professional help. Infants' feet that curve excessively inwards or outwards can be corrected with shoes that are modified and fitted with arch support. By age three, when children develop a heel to toe gait, excessively flat feet should be fit by a podiatrist with a custom molded shoe insert (orthotic) or a pre-fabricated insert to assist bones to develop in correct alignment. Infants and toddlers feet are normally fat, flat and flexible. Normally, these qualities decrease until about age seven.

Children's feet grow rapidly during the first year, sometimes reaching almost half their adult foot size. This is why podiatrists consider the first year to be the most important in the development of the feet. With a well coordinated effort between parents, podiatrists and shoe fitters, you can ensure that your child gets the right shoe to keep them happy and active as they grow and play.

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Orthotics for Your Kids

Orthotics are shoe inserts that are intended to correct an abnormal, or irregular walking pattern. They perform functions that make standing, walking, and running more comfortable and efficient by altering slightly the angles at which the foot strikes a walking or running surface. As such, orthotics are often effective in the treatment of children with foot deformities or to improve foot performance for some athletes.

If a podiatrist determines that your child needs to be fitted for orthotics, those orthotics will usually need to be replaced when the child's foot has grown two sizes. Different types of orthotics may be needed as the child's foot develops and changes shape.

The length of time a child needs orthotics varies considerably, depending on the seriousness of the deformity and how soon the correction is addressed. Ask your podiatrist to evaluate your child's feet to determine if they need orthotics at your back to school visit.