

WHY YOUR CHILD'S FOOT CARE IS IMPORTANT

Having strong, healthy feet allows your child to walk, run, and play. If your child's feet form correctly, certain types of back and leg pain can be avoided later in life. Exams of the feet and ankles ensure that your child's bones *are* growing correctly. Your doctor can also make sure that your child is walking right. This helps prevent some future foot problems. And if a problem does arise, it can be handled early—when it is easiest to treat.

YOUR BABY'S FEET

Both the size and shape of your child's feet change quickly during the first year of life. Because a baby's feet are flexible, too much pressure or strain can affect the shape of the foot. To help ensure normal growth, allow your baby to kick and stretch his or her feet. Also, make sure shoes and socks don't squeeze toes.



Possible Foot Care

Talk with the doctor if you are concerned about your baby's feet. Many infants have feet that appear to turn in. This may worry you, but it is rarely a problem. The shape of the foot changes as your child grows.

Your child's doctor may suggest a gentle stretching exercise to aid proper development.



YOUR TODDLER'S FEET

Your toddler will walk when he or she is ready. Try not to force the issue. Instead, watch your child's gait once he or she does begin to walk. Does the toe touch down instead of the heel? Does your child always sit while others play actively? If so, talk with the doctor. If your toddler's feet are fat, flat, and floppy—don't worry. This is usually normal. Also, many toddlers toe-in, but most outgrow the problem.



When Foot Care Is Needed

During a foot exam, the doctor will watch your toddler walk. If a gait problem exists, the doctor works to identify its cause.

- To help with severe flat feet, special shoes or **orthoses** (custom-made shoe inserts) may be prescribed.
- To correct mild toeing-in, your toddler may need to sit in a different position while playing or watching TV.
- If your child's feet turn in or out a lot, corrective shoes, splints, or night braces may be prescribed. Wearing these devices can help the foot as it grows.

Footnote

See your child's doctor for ingrown toenails and skin problems as well as questions about foot form and function.

YOUR CHILD'S ACTIVE FEET

The foot's bone structure is pretty well formed by the time your child reaches age 7 or 8. But if a **growth plate** (the area where bone growth begins) is injured, the damaged plate may cause the bone to grow oddly. With a doctor's care, however, the risk of future bone problems is reduced.



An x-ray can show damage to a bone growth plate.

When to Call the Doctor

If an injury is mild, your child probably will not remember it for very long. But if your child keeps complaining of pain, have the injury checked by a doctor. Also, call the doctor anytime an injury causes serious swelling, localized tenderness, limping, or ongoing night pains.

Treating an Injury

If a bone or growth plate is damaged, your child may need to use crutches to take weight off the injury as it heals. In the case of fracture, a cast, splint, or brace may be needed to hold the bone in place during healing.



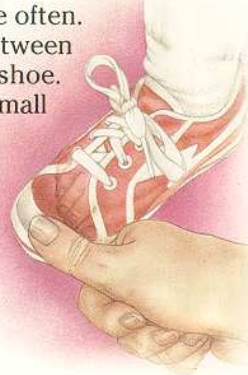
IF THE SHOE FITS

If your child's feet grow correctly and stay healthy, foot problems are less likely later in life. For healthier young feet, be sure your child's shoes fit. Outline your child's foot when he or she is standing. Place the shoe over the tracing to see if the shoe is big enough to hold the foot comfortably. When possible, have your child's feet measured at a shoe store.

For Fit Feet

Pay attention to your child's feet and the shoes you put them in. Remember the tips below.

- Check your child's shoe size often. Make sure there is space between the toes and the end of the shoe. Wearing shoes that are too small cramps the foot. This may affect foot function.
- Don't let your child wear hand-me-down shoes. Because most shoes mold to the foot, wearing hand-me-downs can affect the shape of your child's feet.



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