Take the 1, 2, 3 Test

Sport-Specific Shoes

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Heel pain is one of the most common complaints among growing children who play sports. Physical activity, particularly jumping or activities requiring cleats, irritates the growth centers of the heels and is painful with side-to-side pressure. Reducing activities, immobilization and orthotics are often needed to resolve the episode of pain. Heel pain can also be caused by foot type, and your pediatric physician will be able to determine proper treatment.

Advice for Parents

Problems noticed at birth will not always disappear by themselves. You should not wait until the child begins walking to take care of a problem you’ve noticed earlier. It is best to take action when the child is a toddler to ensure better responsiveness to conservative treatment options.

Remember that lack of complaint by a youngster is not a reliable sign. The bones of growing feet are so flexible that they can be twisted and distorted without the child being aware of it.

Walking is the best of all foot exercises, according to pediatric physicians. They also recommend that walking patterns be carefully observed. Does the child toe in or out or have knock knees or other gait abnormalities? These problems can be corrected if they are detected early.

With the exception of infancy, going barefoot is not encouraged among children. Walking barefoot on dirty pavements exposes children’s feet to a variety of dangers including sprains, fractures and infection from wounds. Another potential problem is plantar warts, a condition caused by a virus that invades the sole of the foot through cuts and breaks in the skin. They require extensive treatment and can keep children from school and other activities.

Heel pain is one of the reasons you should know.

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Be careful about applying home remedies to children’s feet. Preparations strong enough to kill certain types of fungus can harm the skin.

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What you should know.

Children’s Foot Health

What you should know.

Children’s Foot Health
Your Baby’s Feet

The human foot—one of the most complicated parts of the body—has 26 bones, including an intricate system of ligaments, muscles, blood vessels and nerves. Because the feet of young children are soft and pliable, abnormal body forces can cause deformities.

A child’s feet grow rapidly during the first year. For this reason, pediatric physicians, also known as podiatrists, consider this period to be the most critical stage of the foot’s development.

Here are some suggestions to help ensure normal development:

- Look carefully at your baby’s feet. If you notice something that does not look normal to you, contact an APMA podiatric physician. Many deformities will not correct themselves if left untreated.
- Keep your baby’s feet unrestricted. No shoes or booties are necessary for infants. These can restrict movement and can inhibit toes and feet from normal development.
- Provide an opportunity for exercising the feet. Lying uncovered enables the baby to kick and perform other motor movements that prepare the feet for weight bearing.
- Change the baby’s position several times a day. Lying too long in one spot can put excessive strain on the feet and legs. Be sure to limit how much time your baby spends standing in an activity center to no more than 15 minutes at a time.

Baby’s First Shoes

It is advisable to force a child to walk. When physically or mentally ready, the child will walk. Comparisons with other children are misleading, since the age for independent walking ranges from 10 to 18 months.

When a baby first begins to walk, shoes are not necessary indoors. As a toddler, walking barefoot allows the youngster’s foot to grow normally and to develop its musculature and strength, as well as the grasping action of toes. Of course, velcro options or tights, when walking outside or on rough surfaces, baby’s feet should be protected in lightweight, flexible footwear made of natural materials.

Walking Warning Signs

Once your baby is on the move, assess your child’s walking pattern or gait. It is not uncommon for little ones to walk on their toes. However, persistent toe-walking is not normal. An APMA podiatric physician can examine a child to make a proper diagnosis and determine the best treatment option.

Abnormal walking, including toe-walking, can lead to foot and ankle problems later in life. Flatfootness beyond the early years can lead to bunions, hammertoes, heel pain and tendon problems. Children with a family history of foot problems should see a podiatric physician once the child begins walking to ensure the feet are developing normally.

Walking Warning Signs

- In-toeing

Other common childhood walking irregularities include in-toeing and metatarsus adductus (MTA). In-toeing occurs when one or both feet point toward the other due to a rotation in the foot, leg, thigh or hip. Often children will sit on their legs in a 90-degree position. This can also cause feet to point inward. Excessive tripping, like many walking irregularities, can often reveal a more serious condition such as in-toeing.

Walking Warning Signs

- In-toeing

In-toeing and Metatarsus Adductus

“Crisscrossed.” Since it should never be assumed that a child will grow out of a foot condition such as in-toeing, an APMA podiatric physician can prescribe more aggressive treatment options such as a cast or brace. Metatarsus adductus, a bending of the foot inward at the instep resembling the letter “C,” is also prevalent among early walkers. Tripping is also a warning sign of MTA. In addition, parents need to pay close attention to their child’s foot formation and walking pattern. An APMA podiatric physician can diagnose and treat MTA, with serial casting and in more severe cases, surgery.

Since not all children are quick to tell their parents when they are experiencing foot pain, parents should pay attention to unspoken signs such as a child’s limping, tripping, taking their shoes off frequently or unevenly wear footwear. The feet of young children may be unstable, which can make walking difficult or uncomfortable. A thorough examination by an APMA podiatric physician may detect an underlying defect or condition, which may require immediate treatment or consultation with another specialist. To find a podiatrist in your area, visit www.apma.org.

Children’s Shoe Shopping Guide

Cut along the dotted line and keep as a reference.

As a child’s feet continue to develop, it may be necessary to change their shoe and sock size every few months to allow room for the feet to grow. Although foot problems result mainly from injury, hereditary factors, deformity or illness, improper footwear can aggravate pre-existing conditions.

Before parents invest in a new pair of children’s footwear, some foot factors need to be considered:

- Shoes that don’t fit properly can aggravate the foot. Always measure a child’s feet before buying shoes and fit the shoe to the foot.
- Never hand down footwear. Just because a shoe size fits one child comfortably doesn’t mean it will fit another the same way. Sharing shoes can spread fungi like athlete’s foot and nail fungus.
- Watch for signs of irritation. Redness is a sure sign that a shoe is too tight or too loose. If your child always wants to remove one or both of their shoes, this may be an unspoken sign that the shoes don’t fit properly.
- Examine the heels. When children begin to show in-toeing, they may wear through the heels of their shoes much quicker than outgrowing the shoes themselves. Uneven heel wear can indicate a foot problem that should be checked by a podiatrist.

Five shoe-buying tips for children:

1. Take your child shoe shopping. It’s important to have your child’s feet measured before buying shoes. Every shoe fits differently. Letting a child have a say in the shoe-buying process promotes healthy foot habits down the road.

2. Shop for shoes later in the day. Feet tend to swell during the day; it’s best to be fitted while they are larger.

3. Buy shoes that do not need a “break-in” period. Shoes should be comfortable immediately.

4. Always buy for the larger foot. Feet are seldom precisely the same size.

5. Have your child try on shoes with socks or tights. That’s how they’ll be worn.

Children's Shoe Shopping Guide

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