

FOOTPRINTS

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KEEPING KIDS ON THEIR FEET

With back-to-school season in full swing, parents and caregivers are looking forward to another year of rapid growth. Children's feet and ankles are no exception. Pay attention to kids' feet and watch out for some common conditions that could have long-term consequences as children grow:

→ PEDIATRIC FLATFOOT

Flatfoot is a foot with a low arch. If left untreated, the condition can last into adulthood. Weight-bearing, both in and out of shoes, may become difficult. Children may experience pain or cramping in the foot, leg, and/or knee. Treatment options include physical therapy, custom orthotics, or shoe modifications. In some cases, anti-inflammatory medications may also be used.

→ SEVER'S DISEASE

This condition is characterized by swelling and irritation of the growth plate in the heel. Bones, muscles, and tendons grow at different rates as children develop physically. Pain, stiffness, or limping may result. Physical activities may make the pain worse. Treatment may include over-the-counter medication, physical therapy, rest, immobilization, or custom shoe inserts.

→ IN-TOEING

In-toeing is more commonly known as being "pigeon-toed." This condition may run in families. The condition may correct itself as the child grows, but in extreme cases, surgery may be necessary for corrective purposes.

→ EXCESSIVE PRONATION

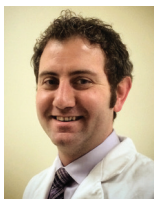
This excessive inward motion of the foot may cause unnecessary stretching and pulling on muscles and tendons of the heel. This stress could contribute to associated knee or hip pain. Functional orthotics, exercise, or shoe inserts could be used as treatment.

WHAT TO LOOK FOR AS CHILDREN'S FEET AND ANKLES DEVELOP

The foot and ankle play an important role in a child's overall health. It's important to keep an eye on them as kids grow, according to APMA member and American College of Foot and Ankle Pediatrics (ACFAP) Vice President Nicholas Pagano, DPM.

“CHILDREN'S FOOTWEAR HAS COME A LONG WAY OVER THE YEARS TO KEEP KIDS HEALTHY. BECAUSE CHILDREN OFTEN GROW AT DIFFERENT PACES, I'M A BIG PROPONENT OF EARLY INTERVENTION TO SOLVE PROBLEMS.”

He emphasized that the proper footwear for each sport is imperative, and kids and caregivers should be aware of any foot or ankle pain. Outfit children with proper footwear for the activity. “The condition and purpose of the shoe are very important. If your child's physical activity involves a lot of lateral movement, for example, I wouldn't recommend using running shoes for that activity.”



Nicholas Pagano, DPM, practices at Barking Dogs Foot and Ankle Care in Plymouth Meeting, PA. All quotes and content were used with his permission.

CONSIDER PURCHASING NEW FOOTWEAR ON A SEASONAL BASIS



Viruses and fungi are common in public places and thrive inside shoes. Dr. Pagano advises keeping footwear fresh to help prevent the spread—and to accommodate growing feet. “As a rule of thumb, I would change your children's shoes every season or if they have excessive wear patterns,” he said.

CONSIDER HEREDITY



“Whenever I examine children's feet, I ask the parents to also remove their shoes and socks,” Dr. Pagano said. “Any noticeable pain or deformity in the parent's foot often means the child may also have that condition later on in life, so it's important to stay proactive.” Dr. Pagano noted that a child's foot should take on the adult foot form at roughly seven years of age.

ENCOURAGE PHYSICAL ACTIVITY



A youth soccer coach himself, Dr. Pagano believes participating in sports contributes to more than just a child's physical development. “Sports promote discipline, teamwork, and a healthy lifestyle,” he said. His recommendation: Don't get too specialized too early. “Overuse injuries such as stress fractures are sometimes due to children only playing one sport throughout the year.”

DR. PAGANO'S PRO TIP FOR PARENTS AND CAREGIVERS

Make a healthy lifestyle fun for kids: Dr. Pagano suggests taking advantage of kids' affinity for technology to help them understand the value of good health and promote physical fitness. “Obesity and early-onset diabetes are true health epidemics, so why not educate kids in ways that they already consume information?” Health and fitness apps can make maintaining a healthy lifestyle easier and more fun for kids.