



IACP ARTHRITIS CLINICS

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FLAT FEET IN CHILDREN

This leaflet gives more information about flat feet in children. If you have any further questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact the foot health team.

What are flat feet?

Feet change a lot through infancy, childhood and adolescence as we grow. Young children have soft and flat feet, which refers to a low foot arch profile. This simply describes what the foot looks like.

While bones of the feet harden into their natural shape, muscles are working hard to keep children active and playing. Typically foot arches are formed by the age of 7-8 years, but some children and adults will always have flat feet as this is their normal foot shape.

Usually flat feet are nothing to worry about, but in some cases there can be associated pain.

When should children have their feet checked?

If children complain of aching or pain in their feet, or if they don't want to play and take part in sport due to pain, this is when it would be appropriate to seek advice from a podiatrist (doctor specialising in foot health).

What does an assessment involve?

Podiatrists will take a detailed medical history, then examine the joints and muscles of your child's feet, knees and hips. They will look at the way your child stands, walks and plays. The podiatrist will then be able to guide you on making treatment decisions. In some cases, other tests may be required to aid in diagnosis, such as X-rays or scans.

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What treatments are available?

Flat feet are not usually the cause of pain, so the podiatrist will identify which joints or soft tissue are causing pain, and guide treatment to improve this. If treatment is indicated, the available options include the following.



Observe and monitor

Sometimes children can have varying foot shapes that change over time, so if your child is not in pain, is taking part in activities and keeping up with other children, often we simply need to observe and monitor.

Footwear

Your child needs comfortable shoes with plenty of room to grow. Make sure their shoes provide required support, the sole should provide support around the heel and not bend easily in the middle. Remember that very stiff or heavy shoes can make walking more difficult.

The shape of the shoe should match the shape of the foot with plenty of room to grow so always measure feet with the child standing. Avoid buying slip-on shoes as these cause the toes to grip within the shoes and squash children's toes.

Stretching and strengthening exercises

Calf muscle stretches, ankle strengthening and balance exercise can help to reduce pain and improve balance. Your podiatrist will advise on exercises and play to help your child.

Activity modification

If the pain is worse when they are doing certain activities, your child may need to temporarily stop or reduce how much they do. This will usually be for a short period of time.

Foot orthoses (insoles)

These include prefabricated or custom-made insoles, and ankle braces that work by supporting and cushioning the foot or by changing the way muscles are used when walking. Insoles do not change the shape of feet, or form arches. For more information, see our leaflet, Foot orthoses.

Surgery

Surgery is considered the last option. It is only undertaken when other treatments have not worked or when foot pain cannot be improved enough to allow comfort and ability to perform daily activities for their age level.

What other things can help?

Lifestyle changes

If your child is overweight, this can increase the load on their feet, making pain worse. Losing weight will help as it will reduce the load going through the foot as your child walks.



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