

Children's Footwear

Information for patients



Podiatry Department

What is this leaflet about?

This leaflet gives advice about selecting footwear for children. Poorly-fitting shoes can cause various problems, whereas a well designed shoe can offer support and protection and prevent problems later in life.

When should children start wearing shoes?

Babies' feet are soft and pliable and they grow rapidly during the first year. Shoes and tights can be outgrown quickly and restricts the development of the feet and can misshape them. It is important to allow the feet to develop naturally, so warm loose socks or booties are best.

Toddlers should be encouraged to walk barefoot for as long as possible. This helps the muscles and bones in the feet to become stronger and encourages the development of balance and proprioception (the body's sense of awareness of position and movement). Footwear is needed for protection when children start walking outside.

Shoe fitting

Check shoes regularly to ensure they have not become too small or worn out and replace them quickly if they have. Wearing poorly-fitting footwear for prolonged periods of time may lead to deformity of the bones. It can also result in painful toenail and skin problems.

When buying new shoes, children should have their feet measured by a trained professional. Shoes should be comfortable from the start and should not need to be "broken in".

If your child has been provided with insoles (orthotics) it is important to take these with you to ensure that they fit correctly in the shoe and leave enough room for the foot.

Length

There should be a thumb's width of extra space between the tip of the **longest** toe and the end of the shoe.

Toe box (width, depth and shape)

The toe box of the shoe should be wide enough and deep enough to accommodate all of the toes without squashing them. A tapered or pointed toe box will squash the toes together, so a round or square toe box is usually better.

Heel cup

The heel cup is the part of the shoe at the back which cradles the heel. It should be stiff enough to stop the heel slipping out and provide support during walking. To check this, grasp the back of the shoe. You should not be able to squeeze the sides together or push the back down. Sandals should have an enclosed heel or a sturdy strap around the back.

Heel height

The heel should be flat or up to 2.5cm in height. Shoes with a higher heel cause the calf muscles to shorten which can lead to problems.

Upper material

The material on the top and sides of the shoe should ideally be made of breathable materials and be waterproof or water resistant. Some synthetic materials, such as plastic, can cause the foot to sweat excessively making blistering and fungal infections more likely.

Sole

A thick rubber sole will protect the bones and feet. If you can easily bend or twist the sole of the shoe then it is too soft and will not support the foot well. Avoid shoes with a smooth sole. The bottom of the shoe should have good grip to help prevent slips and falls.

Shoe fastening

Laces, buckles or Velcro fastening all help to keep the foot securely in place in the shoe and offer extra support. Slip-on styles should be avoided as they are not supportive. To keep a slip-on shoe on, the child has to clench their toes which can cause painful skin, nail, muscle and joint problems.

