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SHOE CHECKLIST FOR DEVELOPING FEET

INDEPENDENT WALKERS

When your child first starts independent walking as their main mode of transport it is a balance between protecting their feet and enhancing their physical development. Predominantly bare feet are best, to enhance their balance, strength and co-ordination but where protection is required a shoe with the following attributes is recommended.

1. straight last

A straight not curved line from the midpoint of the heel to the midpoint of the toe on the sole of the shoe. This minimises in-toeing and aids with lower limb structural alignment

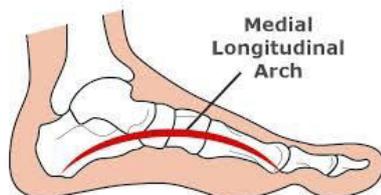


2. firm heel counter/box

A firm filled-in back of the shoe. To test squeeze the sides of the filled-in heel midway up the heel box. The sides of the heel box hold its shape and do not collapse. This is important as it provides a stable base, at heel strike, for the foot and leg to operate from and over.

3. arch support

This is the moulding through the arch, within the shoe, to promote good foot biomechanics. An infant's or toddler's foot will initially appear flat until the foot's intrinsic muscles break down the protective infantile fat pad. This coincides with developmental milestones such as running, tip toe walking and jumping. It is quite usual to have a mobile flat foot until 4 years of age.



4. arch control

This is the shoe's intrinsic ability to resist twisting through the arch. This provides the developing foot with a supportive base to push off over. When you twist the shoe like wringing a washer, it does not have much give.

5. toe flex

The shoe easily bends at the toe for toe-off. Biomechanically this is where your child's foot should bend to push off when walking and running.



6. shoe weight

Make sure that your child's shoe is not too heavy. This is like having a lump of plasticine at the end of a pencil. It is hard to lift and makes foot anomalies associated with weak muscles more obvious and difficult to manage.

From independent walking through to middle primary school age, children's feet are predominantly cartilage (the mature bone's framework and foundation). A child's dynamic foot control and alignment can be markedly influenced by their activity level, strength, flexibility, growth spurts and footwear so it is important to provide them with a supportive base to enhance their biomechanical development. For some children, typically those with "flatter" feet, extra proprioceptive input may be required to enhance their dynamic foot control and these adjustments can easily be made within a good supportive shoe by a paediatric podiatrist or physiotherapist.

The above footwear guidelines still apply, for older children and adolescents.

Remember:

- **support and control the heel from heel-strike to toe-off by having a firm heel counter**
- **support the arch from heel-strike to toe-off by not having too much twist in the shoe**
- **provide sufficient flexibility at the toes for forward propulsion.**

If you have any concerns contact your paediatric physiotherapist or podiatrist to advise you on the best footwear for your child.