



DURHAM
REGION

HEALTH
DEPARTMENT



Friendly Feet

Information about little feet



Your Child's Feet

Strong, straight feet are important because they will help your child to crawl, stand, and walk correctly. Early foot development also determines whether your child will have a lifetime of healthy feet or future foot, leg, and back problems. When children first learn to stand and walk, their feet may turn in or out. This usually corrects itself over several months of weight bearing.

Sitting

Discourage "W sitting" as this can cause strain on the feet and legs. There are many appropriate positions your child can sit in, such as cross-legged, side-sitting or long-legged.

Skip the Socks

Unless it is cold, you might consider removing your child's socks because they can restrict the range of motion in his or her feet and can interfere with balance. Socks can also be slippery and dangerous on uncarpeted surfaces. If your child wears footed sleepers, make sure they are not too snug.

Why Barefoot is Best

Learning to stand and walk while barefoot is best because it:

- Provides sensory feedback to your child's feet
- Gives the foot muscles a better workout
- Helps develop balance
- Helps babies grow accustomed to the feel of different surfaces

When are Shoes Necessary?

All children will need shoes for foot protection outdoors. A small percentage of children require shoes for positioning and stability.

Shopping for Shoes

Here are some points to consider:

- The toe portion of the shoe should be flexible.
- You should not be able to "wring" the shoe, which can happen particularly with canvas shoes.
- Look for some support and stability
- The heel counter should be firm.
- Select the correct size. Both length and width are important. To measure length, leave about a finger's width of space between your child's longest toe and the front of the shoe. Shoes that are too short or long may cause blisters. Next, measure the width of your child's foot and make sure that the shoe is well-fitted.
- Avoid shoes that are too large; your child's foot may begin to roll inside the shoe if there is extra width.
- Make sure that your child tries on a new pair of shoes before you purchase them. Red marks, ridges and blisters on the feet are a sign that the shoe does not fit correctly.



Special Shoes

Occasionally, some children require shoe inserts or orthotics. Such devices are designed to properly position and align the foot, and can help prevent foot deformity or overstretching. Please speak to your physician or an Infant and Child Development Consultant if you have concerns about your child's feet.

Tiptoeing

When your baby is beginning to stand, ensure that the heels are contacting the floor to prevent tiptoeing. Infrequent tiptoeing is normal, but babies who tiptoe the majority of the time may have problems ranging from tight heel cords to hypersensitivity. Tiptoeing may be resolved with stretching or desensitization exercises. Toe walking the majority of time after the age of 18 months should be assessed by a health care professional.



Please speak to an Infant and Child Development Consultant for further information.

The information for this brochure was taken from the following resources:

Fox, S. (1999). *Baby Steps*. New York: Berkley Books.

Potts, M. (2003, December). *Happy Feet*. *Parents*. 146-149.

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