

Flat Feet in Children

What are flat feet?

Flat feet is a condition in which one or both feet don't have a normal arch. At first, all babies' feet look flat because an arch hasn't formed yet. Arches should form by the time your child is 2 or 3 years old. You should know that even in older children, flat feet usually don't cause any problems.

What causes flat feet?

Most flat feet are caused by loose joint connections and baby fat between the foot bones. These conditions make the arch fall when your child stands up. The feet may look like they have arches when your child is sitting or when the big toe is bent backward, but the arch flattens when the child puts weight on the foot.

Should I take my child to the doctor?

If your child complains of foot or ankle pain, take him or her to the doctor. Flat feet in an older child may cause pain in the heel or arch, or may cause pain when walking and running. Your doctor will look at your child's feet to make sure that the pain isn't caused by a problem in the hip or the knee. Rarely, flat feet can be caused by foot bones that are joined together. In this case, the bones can't move, and the foot hurts. Your child may need to have x-rays, but your doctor probably can tell you what the problem is just by looking at your child's feet.

Will my child need special shoes or inserts?

Probably not. Your child's foot development will be the same whether arch supports are worn or not. High-top or special orthopedic shoes, "cookies" or wedges are only useful to keep the shoe on your child's foot. If your child has foot pain, your doctor may recommend a heel cup or a shoe insert.

Will some activities make flat feet worse?

No. You don't need to limit your child's activities. If flat feet become painful from overuse, your doctor may recommend rest. Shoe style, walking barefoot, running, foot exercises or jumping will not make flat feet worse or better.

Can surgery help?

Surgery is not helpful for most patients with flat feet. Rarely, if your child's flat feet are caused by fused foot bones, and if shoe inserts and casts have not helped, surgery may be considered. Your doctor can help you make that decision.

This handout provides a general overview on this topic and may not apply to everyone. To find out if this handout applies to you and to get more information on this subject, talk to your family doctor.

Visit familydoctor.org for more useful information on this and many other health-related topics.

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