

Flat feet

Disclaimer: This fact sheet is for education purposes only. Please consult with your doctor or other health professional to make sure this information is right for your child.

What are flat feet?

Most normal feet have an arch on the inside of the foot. Some children have flat feet, also known as fallen arches. This is when the arch on the inside of the foot does not develop. It can be common for other members of your family to have flat feet. Nearly all toddlers are flat footed. The arch on the inside of the foot develops as the child grows.

What is the cause?

Nearly all children with flat feet have flexible flat feet. Flexible flat feet are caused by softening of the ligaments which hold the bones together. This is known as ligamentous laxity (looseness of the ligaments). Children with ligamentous laxity are often "double jointed". This means they can bend their fingers, knees and elbows backwards without pain, and even rest their thumb on their forearm - something that most of us can't do.

What problems will occur?

In the past being flat footed was thought to cause a lot of foot problems. In fact, the army would not accept soldiers with flat feet! It has been learned in the last 30 years that most people with flat feet have no more foot problems than others. However stiff flat feet can be painful and need treatment.

What treatment will be required?

Most children don't need shoe inserts (orthotics), as they do not make any difference. Orthotics are only sometimes used in older children who have pain. These children often have other problems besides the flexible flat feet. The type of shoe won't change the natural growth of the foot. Shoes are worn to protect our feet, but cannot help feet to develop properly. The right shoes for your child are ones that fit them (ie. those that are not too tight) and those that you can afford.

Remember

- **Most children with flat feet will not need treatment.**
- **Orthotics do not help the development of an arch in the foot any better than a child's natural growth.**



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