

Flat Feet in Kids

Flat feet is when there is no arch of the feet. The arch develops during the first 5-10 years of life. It is normal for children to have flat feet.

Types of Flat Feet

There are two types of flat feet.

- Flexible flat feet
- Rigid flat feet

Flexible flat feet are very common.

Children with flexible flat feet will have a normal looking arch when they are sitting, laying down or on their tip toes. The arch goes away when they stand or bear weight. Most children outgrow their flexible flat feet while some children never develop an arch.

Rigid flat feet are seen in older children.

Unlike flexible flat feet, rigid flat feet do not change. They always lack an arch, even when a child is not bearing weight. Rigid flat feet are stiff and do not move well.

Symptoms

You may notice flat feet when a child is standing or walking.

Adolescents and teens with flexible flat feet and children with rigid flat feet can have symptoms such as:

- Pain in their feet or legs.
- Trouble standing on their tip toes.
- Trouble moving their foot up and down or side to side.
- Pressure sores on the inside of the foot.

How It Is Diagnosed

Your child's doctor can diagnose flat feet with a physical exam. If the flat feet are rigid, or your child is having symptoms, your child may need other tests such as x-rays.

Treatment Options

Most children with flat feet do not need any treatment. Many will develop a normal arch as their foot strengthens and matures as they grow. Check the suggestions below based on your child's age and symptoms.

Infants and toddlers: Flat feet are normal at this age. To help their arch develop, let your child walk barefoot in the home. Buy shoes that are flexible – can be bent in half and twisted side to side easily.

Children with no symptoms: No treatment is needed.

Children with pain or rigid flat feet: They may need treatment. Tell your child's doctor, who can refer you to Pediatric Orthopedics for an evaluation. Some treatment options include:

- Stretching of the heel cord (Achilles tendon).
- Soft shoe inserts to support the arch.
- Physical therapy to strengthen the muscles of the feet.
- Surgery to correct any bone or soft tissue problem (rare).

Your health care team may have given you this information as part of your care. If so, please use it and call if you have any questions. If this information was not given to you as part of your care, please check with your doctor. This is not medical advice. This is not to be used for diagnosis or treatment of any medical condition. Because each person's health needs are different, you should talk with your doctor or others on your health care team when using this information. If you have an emergency, please call 911. Copyright © 9/2021 University of Wisconsin Hospitals and Clinics Authority. All rights reserved. Produced by the Department of Nursing HF#8218.