



Suffolk Podiatry

Children and flat feet

What are flat feet?

Flat feet occur when the foot appears flat, with little or no visible arch along the inside edge when your child is standing. This is completely normal in young children.

Before the age of 3, all children naturally have flat feet, as the arch typically begins to develop after this age.

What causes flat feet?

In most cases, flat feet are inherited and run in families. They are not usually linked to any medical condition and often cause no symptoms or problems.

However, in less common cases, flat feet may be associated with underlying conditions, including:

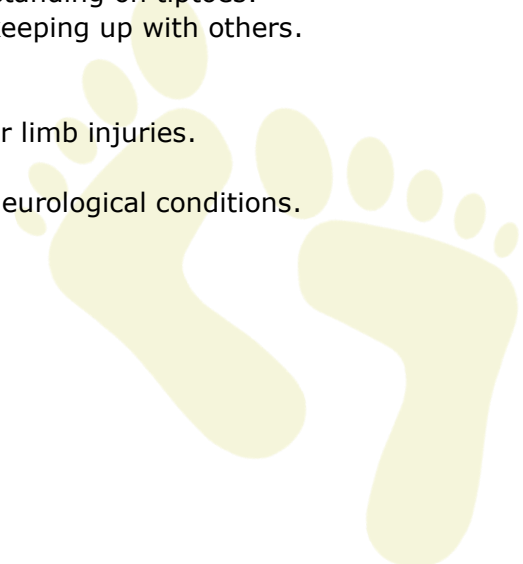
- **Developmental differences:** When the bones of the foot do not form typically during pregnancy.
- **Connective tissue conditions:** Such as hypermobility or Ehlers-Danlos syndrome.
- **Neuromuscular conditions:** Including Cerebral palsy, Spina bifida, or Muscular dystrophy.
- **Injury or overuse:** Where the soft tissues in the foot become stretched or inflamed, sometimes related to activity levels or footwear.



When should you be concerned about your child's flat feet?

Flat feet are common in young children, and in most cases the arch develops naturally over time. However, you should seek advice if you notice any of the following:

- Your child complains of foot, ankle, or leg pain that does not improve with supportive footwear or over-the-counter arch supports.
- The feet appear stiff, or no arch forms when standing on tiptoes.
- Your child has difficulty walking, running, or keeping up with others.
- Frequent tripping.
- Only one foot appears flat.
- Your child frequently experiences foot or lower limb injuries.
- Recovery from injury seems delayed.
- There is a family history of hypermobility or neurological conditions.



Does my child need treatment for flat feet?

Most cases of flat feet are painless and do not require treatment.

However, if your child experiences symptoms such as pain or discomfort, a podiatrist may recommend:

- More supportive footwear
- Exercises to stretch and strengthen the muscles in the lower limbs
- Insoles (orthotics), either over-the-counter or prescribed

These treatments will not change the shape of the feet but may help relieve symptoms and improve comfort.

Staying active

Your child should be encouraged to continue all normal activities, including sports, unless a podiatrist advises otherwise. Staying active supports healthy development and overall wellbeing.

Choosing the right footwear for growing feet

Well-fitting footwear with secure fastening is important for healthy foot development. In most cases, flexible footwear is the most appropriate choice, as it allows natural movement while providing support.

- Lace-up shoes often provide good support, but any footwear should have a secure fastening (such as Velcro or buckles)
- Ensure the sole provides cushioning to absorb impact and improve comfort
- Well-fitting trainers can be just as suitable as traditional shoes if they offer flexibility and support
- Children with more flexible (looser) joints may benefit from boot-style footwear that offers additional ankle support

For more detailed guidance, see our Children's Footwear Advice Leaflet, available on the podiatry page of our website: www.suffolkfed.org.uk/healthcare-services/podiatry

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An NHS service provided by Suffolk GP Federation working with ESNEFT (East Suffolk & North Essex NHS Foundation Trust) in the East, West Suffolk NHS Foundation Trust in the West, Suffolk County Council and Norfolk & Suffolk NHS Foundation Trust

