

# FIRST STEPS

KEEPING KIDS' FEET HEALTHY AND HAPPY



Whether it is a precious baby's first steps or a quick-maneuvering teenager's winning soccer goal, healthy feet and sure-footedness make milestones in a child's life possible. Starting at birth, paying close attention to your little one's feet from proper grooming to gait will ensure a solid foundation as your youngster grows. After all, their feet are meant to last a lifetime!

HERE ARE SOME SUGGESTIONS TO HELP ENSURE NORMAL DEVELOPMENT AS YOUR CHILD GROWS:

## INFANCY (birth to 1 year)

- **Look carefully at your baby's feet.** A child's feet grow rapidly during the first year. For this reason, podiatric physicians consider this period to be the most critical stage of the foot's development. If you notice something that does not look normal to you, contact a podiatric physician. Most deformities will not correct themselves if left untreated.
- **Keep your baby's feet unrestricted.** No shoes or booties are necessary for infants. These can restrict movement and can inhibit toes and feet from normal development.
- **Provide an opportunity for exercising the feet.** Lying uncovered enables the baby to kick and perform other related motions that prepare the feet for weight bearing.

## TODDLER (1-3 years)

- **Keep bare feet indoors.** Walking barefoot allows your toddler's foot to grow normally and to develop its musculature and strength, as well as the grasping action of toes. Of course, when walking outside or on rough surfaces, feet should be protected in lightweight, flexible footwear made of natural materials.
- **Assess your child's walking pattern or gait.** It is not uncommon for little ones to walk on their toes. However, persistent toe-walking is not normal. A podiatric physician can examine a child to make a proper diagnosis and determine the best treatment option.
- **Pay attention to unspoken signs.** If your child is limping, tripping, or always wants to remove one or both shoes, this may be an unspoken sign that the shoes don't fit properly.

## YOUNG CHILD (4-8 years)

- **Take your child shoe shopping.** It's important to have your child's feet measured before buying shoes. Every shoe fits differently. Letting a child have a say in the shoe-buying process promotes healthy foot habits down the road.
- **Never hand down footwear.** Just because a shoe size fits one child comfortably doesn't mean it will fit another the same way. Sharing shoes can spread fungi like athlete's foot and nail fungus.
- **Establish good outdoor footwear practices.** Spending summer at the pool? Wear flip-flops around the pool and in the locker room to prevent bacterial infections. Raising a ski bunny? Make sure winter boots fit properly. Kids should be able to wiggle their toes, but boots should immobilize the heel, instep, and ball of their foot to help prevent blisters, chafing, and ankle or foot injuries.

## PRETEEN (9-12 years)

- **Play it safe with sports.** Sports-related foot and ankle injuries become common as children start participating in athletic activities. Parents should consider discussing these matters with their family podiatric physician if they have children participating in sports.
- **Promote healthy pedicures.** While many young girls would like a pretty pedicure to match Mom's, it's important they learn how to trim and polish nails safely. Visit [www.apma.org](http://www.apma.org) to see a "Pedicure Pointers" tip sheet.
- **Buy shoes that are comfortable right away.** Kids may see their friends with the latest flashy sneakers or trendy boots, but make sure those styles are comfortable for your child's foot before purchasing them. Properly fitted shoes should never require a "break-in" period.