

Remember if you are provided with insoles (orthotics) it is important that these are taken with you when buying shoes to ensure that they fit correctly in the shoe and leave room for the foot. Check your child walking in the shoes in the shoe shop and make sure the shoe is not slipping up and down at the heel or their foot is being pushed out of the shoe at the back.



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Association of Paediatric Chartered Physiotherapists

Choosing Footwear for Children

Information for parents and carers



Buying the correct footwear is very important for toddlers and children as the foot is a complicated part of the body. From babyhood the foot is soft and pliable and if the wrong footwear is worn for prolonged periods of time it may cause damage and lead to problems later in life. Young children who are not yet walking do not usually need shoes, but you may wish to buy them soft shoes which help to protect the feet and keep baby warm when you are outside. Please check regularly to make sure the toes have room to move. Some children benefit from being in firm shoes before they walk and your physiotherapist will advise you on this.

By taking the following points into account you should be guided towards suitable footwear for your child. Don't assume that because one pair of shoes is more expensive that it is automatically better than a cheaper option. Remember also that socks and tights must fit and not be too tight for growing toes.

- **Always get your child's feet measured by a professional:** If shoes are too tight they can stop the toes from having enough space and could stop the foot from growing correctly.

- **The shape of the shoe:** The front of the shoes should be wider than at the heel. Avoid shoes with pointy toes as these can restrict the movement at the toes, especially if your child has broad feet.

- **Flexible shoes:** Shoes should provide support to the foot particularly around the heel. A firm heel cup means that the shoe or sandal should have a solid back. Sandals need an enclosed heel. If you grasp the sides of the back of the shoe, you should not be able to squeeze the sides together or push the back down. Aim to buy a shoe which allows the foot to bend. However, if you can twist the sole, the shoe is too soft and will not support the foot well.

- **Trainers:** Trainers are generally foot friendly as long as they are measured correctly. Try and avoid those with synthetic linings which can cause excessive sweating.

- **Plimsolls:** Many schools insist on plimsolls for sports but if your child can wear trainers instead, it would be preferable. Plimsolls offer no support, do not come in half sizes and are only one width so a good fit is very hard to achieve. They often get left at school all term as well so make sure when your child gets new shoes, they get new trainers/plimsolls as well.

- **Fashion Shoes:** Aim to buy shoes with a very small heel. Very flat slip-on shoes (dolly shoes or ballet flats) tend to have thin soles that do not provide enough cushioning for the feet and are often worn a size too small so they do not fall off. They can also be very shallow around the sides of the foot. High heeled shoes can cause the foot to slip forward in the shoe. These shoes can also lead to weight bearing through only the forefoot which could cause pain.

- **Friction on the sole:** Ensure that the pair of shoes has sufficient grip on the bottom of the shoes. If the sole is smooth it can make it easier for slips to occur and cause your child to fall.

- **Shoe fastenings:** Consider how the shoe is fastened, ideally shoes should have laces, buckles or Velcro fastenings to help hold the heel in place during movement. Slip-on type shoes cause the child to clench their toes to keep the shoe on which may cause pain if walking long distances. Encourage your children to tie their laces if they wear lace-up shoes or trainers.

Remember, shoes should be comfortable from the start. If new shoes need to be "broken in," it means either they were not properly designed or not properly fitted for your child's foot.

When checking the current pair of shoes you should be aiming to have approximately 1cm space at the end of the toes inside the shoes. If in doubt go along to have the feet re-measured by a professional who can inform you if there is sufficient room within the shoe.

Where possible avoid slip-on shoes, sheepskin boots (e.g. Ugg boots), rubber clogs (e.g. Crocs) and jelly shoes which offer very little support for the foot. There are occasions when a child may want to wear these, such as wellington boots when it is raining, and it may be appropriate for them to do so, but as a guide, aim to wear supportive footwear if you are expecting your child to be doing any amount of walking or activity.