

Patient Education



ARNOLD PALMER HOSPITAL
For Children
Supported by Arnold Palmer Medical Center Foundation

Orthopedic Center
at Arnold Palmer Hospital
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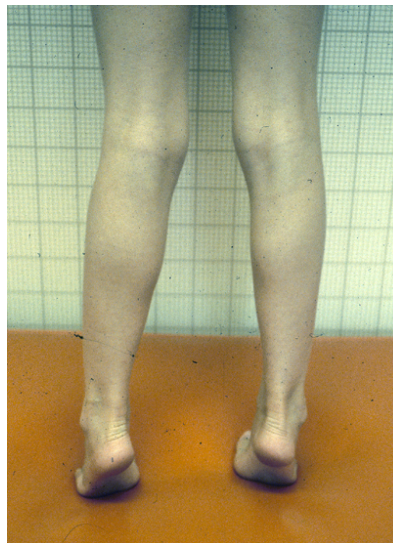
Flat Feet (Pes Planus)

Flat feet (the lack of an arch when standing) are common in all age groups. Many children and 10% of adults have flexible flat feet. This is also called pronated feet, or “low arches.”

These children look like their ankles roll in and this puts weight on the inside of the foot..

There are two types of flat feet, flexible and rigid. If an arch is present when standing “tip-toe” the flat foot is called flexible. Flexible flat feet rarely produces symptoms or requires treatment. If an arch is not present when standing “tip-toe,” the flat foot may be “rigid.” Rigid flat feet are more likely to require further evaluation and possible treatment.

Your doctor can tell by examining your child whether the flat feet are flexible or rigid. Stand behind your child and have them stand on their toes. If their heel “curls in” then the foot is flexible. If it does not, then it is considered rigid. Rigid flatfeet are rare before the age of 10. Your doctor may choose to obtain xrays. X-rays of flat feet are usually normal but can show some signs of an abnormal connection between bones when the flat foot is “rigid.”



Flexible flat feet roll inward with normal standing. This is called pronation. The arch is restored when the child stands on tiptoes.

Treatment

Generally there is no treatment needed. However, a child with a painful flexible flat feet may benefit from soft arch supports. These provide only comfort and do not “create” an arch. Corrective shoes and bracing also do not “create” an arch.

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Facts about flexible flat feet

- Flexible flat feet are a common, usually painless condition that is often normal.
- Corrective shoes or inserts do not “create” an arch.
X-ray studies have shown that shoe inserts will change the shape of the foot while the insert is in. However, as soon as the insert is removed, the foot goes right back to being “flat.”
- Most children with flat feet actually find the inserts uncomfortable and frequently will not want to wear them.
- Flexible flat feet will not interfere with your child’s ability to learn to walk or play sports.
- In some cultures, “orthopaedic shoes” are often sold for this condition. These are often extremely expensive (\$200 each!) and have never scientifically been proven to help.
- Shoe salespersons may tell you expensive shoes will help your child walk better. This is not true. Regular, inexpensive shoes may be worn.
- For flat feet that have some symptoms, the best orthotic tends to be a soft over-the-counter small heel lift which can help relieve some of the pressure on the inner aspect of the foot
- For older children (usually teens), some running shoes that are made for “pronators” tend to fit flat feet slightly better and can be more comfortable for runners or athletic training.

Did you know?

A three-year study of children with flexible flat feet compared children who were not treated with children who were treated with shoes, arch supports, and orthotics. There was no difference in shape of the arch after 3 years whether the children were treated or not. So, we do not recommend treatment for flat feet. Most flat-footed children will develop an arch around the age of 6-10 years with or without a support.

The best recommendation for children’s shoes is that they should fit adequately and allow flexibility of movement. Studies from India have shown that children who were mostly barefooted during childhood had the most normal adult feet. Children who wore sandals were next, while the children who wore closed-toe hard shoes had the worst and weakest feet. So, we would recommend a soft flexible shoe for daily wear to protect the feet and allow for adequate growth and strengthening of the foot muscles.

Flat-footed adults wear out their shoes faster than adults with average feet, but the military services have determined that men with flat feet do not have any more problems than men with average feet. The U.S. Military Academy found that the only thing related to increased foot problems was lack of conditioning before beginning basic training. Also, there are many excellent athletes who have flat feet because the flexibility required for most sports seems to be more common in people with flat feet. One study of elite athletes found more flat-footed athletes than average for the general population