

## What are Flat Feet?

Foot shape changes through infancy, childhood and adolescence. Very young children have soft, flexible feet which appear low arched. A child's muscles work hard to keep them active and playing. The bones of the feet harden with age and help form a more natural shape. Being active will help this.

Typically foot arches appear formed by 7-8 years old. However, some children and adults will always have flat feet as this is their normal foot shape. Usually, a lowered arch (flat feet) are nothing to worry about but, in some cases, can be associated with pain. ([www.nhsdirect.wales.nhs.uk/encyclopaedia/f/article/flatfeet](http://www.nhsdirect.wales.nhs.uk/encyclopaedia/f/article/flatfeet))

## When Should Children Have Their Feet Checked?

- If they complain of aching or pain in their feet.
- If participating in play and sport causes pain.
- If they suffer with frequent trips or falls.



## What Does An Assessment Involve?

The Podiatrist or Orthotist needs to take a detailed medical history and examine the joints and muscles of your child's feet, knees and hips. They will look at their footwear and the way your child stands, walks and plays.

## What Treatments Are Available?



As mentioned, flat feet are not usually a cause for concern but if the child is complaining of pain, the Podiatrist & Orthotist will be able to identify which anatomical structures are causing the pain. This will help the clinician to guide treatment to improve the child's pain. If treatment is indicated, some options include the following.

### **Observe and Monitor.**

Children can have varying foot shapes that change over time. Therefore, if your child is not in pain and is taking part in regular activities and keeping up with other children, often it is best to observe and monitor for symptoms.

- **Activity Modification.**

In some cases if the pain worsens doing activities your child may need to temporarily reduce or cease activities.

- **Lifestyle Changes.**

If your child is overweight this can significantly affect their walking pattern and increase load on their feet, making pain worse. Losing weight will help.

<https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/healthy-weight/overweight-children-advice-for-parents/>

If you feel you need further help with your child's weight loss, you can discuss this with your GP or health visitor.



- **Stretching and Strengthening Exercises.**

Calf muscle stretches, ankle strengthening and balance exercise can help reduce pain and improve function. Your Podiatrist can advise you on this.

- **Footwear.**

Often children's shoes can be the source of pain even though they may be an expensive shoe. Your child's shoes should be comfortable, so that the shape of the shoe matches their foot with plenty of room to



grow (Always measure feet with the child standing). Make sure their shoes have support in the sole and around the heel. It should not bend too easily in the middle and the heel counter should be stiff. However, VERY stiff or heavy shoes make walking more difficult and tiring. Avoid buying slip-on shoes as these cause the toes to grip/claw and squash their toes.



- **Foot Orthoses (insoles).**

These include prefabricated or custom-made insoles, and ankle braces that work by supporting and cushioning the foot or by changing the way muscles are used when walking. Insoles do not change the shape of feet, or form arches.

If you have any further queries please contact Podiatry and Orthotics Department on 01633615225 or email [risca.podiatry@wales.nhs.uk](mailto:risca.podiatry@wales.nhs.uk)



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