

Birmingham Foot Clinic Advice Guide

When your child walks

Information for parents

There is so much complex co-ordination in the apparently simple act of walking that it takes a long time for toddlers to master the art. Your child's feet may be perfectly healthy, and yet they may appear to have leg or foot problems just because of the normal developmental changes as they grow and walk.

1. Normal infants are quite chubby by the time they start trying to walk. They have a thick pad of fat filling up the arch of each foot, just as they have a pad of fat in each cheek. This fat pad in each foot tends to make feet very flat looking, until they are two or three years old. At three to four years of age, this fatty pad gradually disappears and the normal arch shape gradually becomes noticeable.

2. When normal sturdy children start to walk and run, they usually do look rather bowlegged and tend to be in-toed. They also tend to trip over their toes rather easily. After a time this in-toeing reduces gradually and they do not trip up so easily.

3. The bowlegged appearance gradually changes to a moderate (and perfectly normal) degree of knock-knee. This usually happens at the age of three to four years old, and especially if the child is heavy.

4. The knock-knee also straightens out of its own accord usual at the age five or six or seven years old.

5. All infants are very carefully checked at birth for leg and foot problems and it is most unlikely that a problem which needed action, below the age of four or five years old would go unnoticed.

6. Shoes are necessary for children purely to protect their feet from injury. If toddlers are not going to be walking where they might step on something which might injure them, **they do not need to wear shoes**. Normal feet do not need support and so there is no need to rush and buy shoes. When shoes are necessary, be sure to get shoes which are the right size with room to grow. Have them checked for size every three months.

7. Active healthy children, who do not complain of any pain, are unlikely to have a leg or foot problem if their shoes are wearing in the usual pattern, slightly more to the outside of the heels and fairly evenly on the soles.

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