

## Why does my child walk funny?

A child's pattern of walking differs to that of the adult population. From our first step through to fluid walking and running our bodies, especially our legs and feet are continually developing.

When a young child begins to walk their parents may notice flat feet and a bandied leg appearance, as the child develops into a toddler changes such as the development of knocked knees may become evident. These appearances can be normal in childhood development however if these signs are prolonged, asymmetrical, become symptomatic and cause pain or progressively get worse that is of concern.

It is recommended that if you are worried about how your child is walking or they are experiencing pain that they be seen by a podiatrist to ensure that no future, long term problems arise.

Below is a list of common childhood foot and leg conditions;

- Flat feet
- Pigeon toes/knocked knees
- Growing pains
- Sever's disease
- Osgood-Schlatters disease
- Metatarsus adductus
- Infection – skin and nails
- Warts

**Flat Feet:** Your child may appear to have 'flat feet' or 'rolled-in ankles' for a period of time. This can often be a normal part of childhood development. If it is excessive, lasts for a long period of time or becomes symptomatic for your child, it may require treatment.



**Pigeon toes/knocked knees:** Within the early years of your child's development their legs and feet will undergo various rotational changes. This may result in your child walking with their feet turned out ("duck footed") or turned in ("pigeon toed"). It is also common for children to go through stages of being bow-legged or having knocked-knees.

Depending on the age of your child the appearance of their feet and legs may be a normal part of

development that they will in time grow out of.

If the appearance is severe, painful, prolonged or asymmetrical, treatment may be required.

**Growing pains:** Growing pains are pain within the leg muscles (not the joints) and can affect up to 20% of children. Most commonly occurring during primary school years, growing pains affect girls and boys equally.

Often a child will complain of pain in the afternoons or evenings and may even wake with pain at night. The pain is often felt in both legs and/or feet and can occur after a big day of activity.

There is sometimes no obvious cause for growing pains however some explanations can be; muscle fatigue from physical activity, poor posture or biomechanical factors. These biomechanical factors may include children who have flat feet.

If your child is experiencing pain in their legs a podiatry assessment is beneficial. It is important to rule out any other sinister causes of leg pain including arthritis and infection.

**Sever's Disease:** Although the name sounds frightening, Sever's disease is a common injury that occurs in children. It can cause painful heels particularly after exercise, but is usually only temporary and has minimal long-term effects.

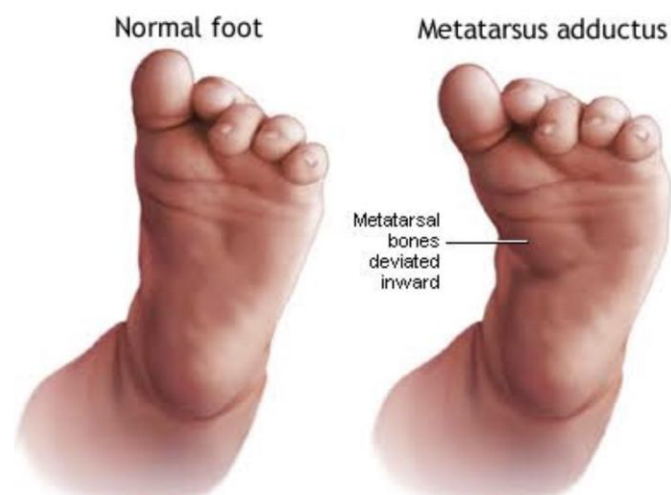
Sever's disease is inflammation of the growth plate in the heel and can occur between the ages of 8 to 15, when children go through some of their most rapid growth.

Once the growth plate is formed children will often stop having any pain. Whilst your child is symptomatic there are many interventions your podiatrist can implement to ease the pain.

**Osgood-Schlatters disease:** Very similar to Sever's however the growth plate affected is within the knee. It is characterised by a painful bump just below the knee and often seen in young adolescents. Risk factors can include increased physical activity that requires running, jumping and change of direction.

Your child's biomechanical foot posture and upper leg muscle strength can play a role in developing this condition. Contact your podiatrist if your child has ongoing knee pain.

**Metatarsus Adductus:** A foot deformity that is sometimes visible from birth. The front half of the foot bends in towards the middle of the body. This condition is thought to be caused when the baby is inside the womb, more common in twins or babies in the breech position. If untreated this foot deformity could cause the child to develop an in-toed walk and lead to further complications in the future. If you notice a bent appearance of the foot contact your podiatrist for a consultation.



**Infections – skin & nails:** Toenails that are discoloured, fragile or painful can often be impacted by infection either fungal or bacterial.

Infections can also compromise our skin. Smelly feet, itching and peeling skin are common concerns for a child with tinea. This condition is very contagious and it is recommended that you have a podiatrist assess your child's feet to ensure appropriate treatment is commenced.

**Warts:** Warts are often seen on the bottom of children's feet and appear to be a round lesion. These can be asymptomatic or painful when squeezed. These are very contagious and require immediate treatment by a podiatrist. If your child has warts on other areas of their body be sure to check the soles of their feet regularly.



### **Footwear for children**

When your child is very young it is important to not restrict their development with tight onesies, booties, socks or shoes. Allow them to kick and exercise their legs and feet. When they begin walking barefoot is acceptable and recommended in non-problematic feet. As they begin to grow older a supportive shoe is recommended to promote healthy development and prevent potential injury.

Qualities to look for in a child's shoe include:

- Adequate length and width
- A firm sole, only bending at the toes
- A method of fixation (laces, velcro, buckle)
- Good quality material that is natural (e.g. leather) and breathable.
- Avoid elastic sided shoes as these can stretch easily and the shoe will lose support and stability