

### **Protection of the Feet**

The primary purpose of shoes is to protect the feet from cold and when walking on rocks, sharp objects, hot pavement, or other dangerous surfaces. Children do not need shoes for support of the feet or ankles. Standing, crawling, and walking barefooted can be good for your child. Walking in bare feet helps to develop stronger, more flexible, and less deformed feet than wearing shoes. Walking barefoot on soft surfaces like grass or sand is good exercise for foot muscles. Standing or walking in socks is not recommended. The foot muscles do not get the same amount of exercise in socks and standing or walking in socks, especially on hardwood or vinyl floors, can be dangerous because socks are slippery.

### **Selecting Shoes**

Most parents choose shoes for their children based on appearance or style. Be sure to also choose shoes that

- Are shaped like a normal foot
- Protect feet from injury
- Protect feet from cold in winter
- Stay on when the child is walking/running
- Allow adequate room for the toes
- Have non-slip soles
- Have flat heels
- Are soft and flexible

Shoes that are too long or too large will cause the child to trip or fall. Expensive shoes are not necessarily better. Avoid stiff or rigid shoes, shoes with higher heels, and shoes with pointed or narrow toes like cowboy boots.

### **Shoes for Children with Special Needs**

Infants and young children with movement problems benefit from standing, crawling, and walking barefoot too, even when they use adapted equipment like prone standers. Check with your doctor or physical therapist about your child's unique needs. Be sure your child wears shoes when riding on a tricycle or any mechanical device that could trap the feet.

### **Special Shoes**

Sometimes, if the muscle or ligaments of the feet are weak or when the bones in the feet are not aligned correctly, shoes might be recommended to improve the position of the foot. Special shoes may also be recommended to adjust for difference in leg length or to allow the child to wear orthoses (orthotics). Shoes are not likely to "correct" the problem but, by putting the foot in a better position, they might prevent wear and tear on other joints or improve muscle control.

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### **Reference**

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