

Most children learn to walk at about the time of their first birthday, although some learn months earlier or later. As your child begins to walk, you may have your first questions about what shoes he or she should wear. A growing child will need new shoes frequently and more questions will arise.

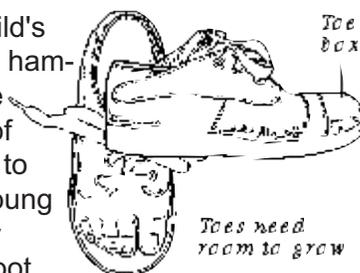
To help you answer these questions and find the proper shoe for your child, here are some suggestions from the American Orthopaedic Foot and Ankle Society. Its members are medical doctors who, after medical school, have taken at least five years of training and study to become specialists in the care of the musculoskeletal system. They have a special interest and expertise in the care of the foot and ankle.

You should ask yourself the following questions when selecting your child's shoes:

- How does the shoe fit?
- How is the shoe made?
- Is the type of shoe appropriate for your child's age?

The Fit

Pay attention to the shoe's proper length, width and depth when fitting your child's shoe. Poorly fitting children's shoes can cause toe problems, ingrown toenails, hammer toes, calluses and bunions. Children's feet grow in spurts and they require new shoes every three to four months. Most early toddlers (under 16 months of age) grow more than one-half a foot size in two months. Toddlers from age 16 to 24 months grow an average of one-half a foot size every three months. The young child, 24 to 36 months old, grows approximately one-half a foot size every four months, and children over 3 years of age experience increases of one-half a foot size every four to six months.



Seventy percent of children wear shoes with D and E widths. Most boys wear E width and most girls wear D width. A tie-fastened shoe can accommodate most widths. You should examine the depth of the shoe to make sure the top of the shoe doesn't press on the toes or the toenails. Look for shoes with rounded toe boxes to give the toes more room for movement.

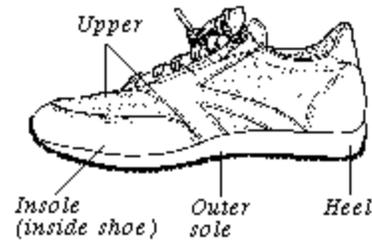
Remember, shoes should be comfortable from the start. If new shoes need to be "broken in," it means either they were not properly designed or not properly fitted for your child's foot.

Shoe Construction

Shoes consist of four parts: the upper part, the insole, the outer sole, and the heel.

Upper Part

The upper part of the child's shoe should be made of leather, canvas, or the newer mesh materials. Children's feet perspire greatly, and the upper part of their shoes should be made of breathable materials. Leather or canvas allows the foot to breathe. Avoid man made material, such as plastic.



Insole

Make sure the insole is made of absorbent material. You may want padded insoles. Most children do not need a special arch support. All toddlers younger than 16 months have flat feet and only fully develop an arch by the age of 6 to 8 years.

Outer Sole

The outer sole provides traction, cushioning, and flexibility to the shoe. Some very sticky and thick outer soles can make young children clumsy and cause falls and should be avoided.

Heel

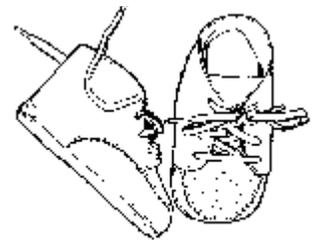
Toddlers do not need heels on their shoes. Flat outer soles make it easier to begin walking. Older children can wear shoes with heels, but they should not be too high (bigger than one inch) as this can cause the foot to slide forward, cramping the toes against the shoe.

The Appropriate Shoe

Pre-Walking Shoe

Certain types of shoes are appropriate for your child's age.

Babies and crawlers do not need shoes. They only need booties, warm wide socks to keep their feet warm, or pre-walking shoes that do not bind their feet. The shoe should be flexible rather than providing a rigid support, and it's very important that the shoe be shaped like the child's foot.



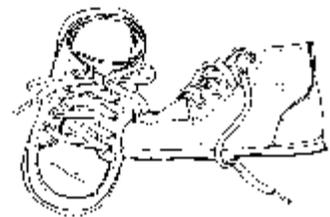
Soft shoes with flexible soles

Your child can go barefoot in a protected environment such as indoors.

Toddler Shoes

Shoes for toddlers, age 9 months to 3 years, should allow the foot to breathe since their feet perspire a great amount. Avoid synthetic materials that don't breathe.

For children 9 to 18 months, choose a high top shoe which will stay on the foot better than an oxford or a low top tennis shoe. A leather or canvas tie shoe is more secure, will stay on the foot, and will fit fat little feet better. The sole of the shoe should be smooth like the palm of your hand. A smooth sole means less friction so the shoe won't grab the floor, possibly causing your child to fall. Choose a light-weight shoe, since children use a lot of energy walking at this age. Toddlers can go barefoot in a protected environment such as indoors.



High-top leather tie shoes with firm soles

School-Age Children's Shoes

Style and shoe fit is important for school-age children. At this age, they can choose from a variety of options including athletic shoes, sandals, hiking shoes, etc.

Look for reasonably priced, flexible, well-ventilated shoes that allow plenty of room for growth. If you have a great deal of difficulty finding shoes that fit, or if your child develops calluses, sores, or other foot problems, consult your physician.

Children's Foot Problems

During the first several years, your child's foot continues to take shape. At this time, problems such as flat foot or high arch may become noticeable, but usually no specific treatment is necessary. If severe, these problems may be symptoms of other, more serious conditions and your child may need a physician's examination and diagnosis.

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