

TOE WALKING

WHAT IS IT?

- When a child walks on the toes or ball of their feet – without the heel or other parts of the foot contacting the ground.
- Common in children up to the age of 3 years.
- Most children will outgrow it.
- Can be caused by the child's habits when learning to walk or an underlying medical condition.

IDIOPATHIC TOE WALKING

- When there is no underlying medical condition causing the toe walking.
- The exact cause is unknown.

SYMPTOMS

- Lower leg muscle tightness.
- Ankle joint tightness.
- Uncomfortable in shoes.
- Unable to participate in certain activities.
- Reduced balance.

WHAT CAN CAUSE TOE WALKING?

- Habits the child develops when learning to walk.
- Short achilles tendon – the tendon that links the lower leg muscles to the heel bone is short and prevents the heel from touching the ground.

An underlying neurological condition that requires further assessment and diagnosis from a doctor, such as:

- Cerebral palsy – abnormal development to areas of the immature brain that controls posture, movement, and muscle function.
- Autism - suggested that the area of the brain responsible for body motion and position is impaired.

TREATMENT

- Over 90% of cases can be treated without surgery.
- Physio – stretching of tight muscles and exercise plans.
- Bracing – ankle-foot orthosis can help maintain a flat foot position, whilst also stretching tight muscles.
- Serial casting - short leg casts can be applied at 1-2 week intervals to stretch muscles and improve foot and ankle position.
- Botox injections – reduce tightness and relax leg muscles.
- Surgery – lengthening of achilles tendon or calf muscle to allow greater range of movement of the foot and ankle.

DIAGNOSIS

- A physical exam of child's walking pattern, range of movement and muscles.
- Assessed for neurological abnormalities.

WHEN TO SEE A DOCTOR

- If your child is still toe walking after the age of 2 years.
- If your child has muscle stiffness or lack of muscle coordination.
- You suspect other developmental issues.