

Flatfoot (Pes Planus)

Men with flatfoot were once ineligible for military service because doctors thought they wouldn't be able to march! Now we know that flatfoot causes little or no problem for most adults or children. Babies' and toddlers' feet may look "flat," but this appearance usually goes away as your child grows.

What is flatfoot?

Flatfoot simply means that the normal arch of the foot is missing, or "flat." Most children with the "flexible" type of flatfoot have no pain and no problems walking or running. The arch is present when your child is not putting weight on the foot. Usually, flexible flatfoot does not need treatment.

Other, less common so-called "rigid" types of flatfoot can cause pain and interfere with activity. The arch is absent even when your child is not putting weight on the foot. Rigid flatfoot often occurs in children with other medical problems that interfere with normal development of the foot bones or with diseases that affect muscles (such as cerebral palsy).

What does it look like?

- The foot appears flat on the floor when your child is standing or walking. Depending on severity, the arch may be reduced but is still present. In severe flatfoot, the inside part of the foot may bulge out where the arch would normally be.
- With flexible flatfoot, the arch appears normal when your child isn't putting any weight on the foot, or when he or she stands on tiptoe. The foot usually does not feel painful.
- Your child's foot moves normally. If your child's foot motion is reduced, this may be a sign of the less common rigid type of flatfoot.
- Rigid flatfoot may be painful, especially if your child is active.

What causes flatfoot?

- Flatfoot is usually congenital (present from birth). Your child may simply have loose ligaments (the tough connective tissue that holds the joints together).
- Babies' and toddlers' feet may look flat because of the normal loose ligaments and fat in the area. For most children, the normal foot arch develops by age 6.

What are some possible complications of flatfoot?

- Most children with flatfoot have no symptoms and no complications.
- If foot pain develops, it can usually be easily treated using arch supports inserted into the shoes.

What puts your child at risk of flatfoot?

If you or other family members have flatfoot, your child may be more likely to have it.

Can flatfoot be prevented?

Since flatfoot is usually congenital, there is no way to prevent it.

How is flatfoot treated?

- Most children with the flexible type of flatfoot need no treatment. There is no type of exercise, special shoe, shoe insert, or other treatment that can change the shape of the foot.
- For babies and toddlers, flatfoot is normal. The normal foot arch usually develops by age 6.
- If your child is having foot pain or other symptoms or is having problems wearing shoes, arch supports may be helpful.
- Your doctor may take x-rays to make sure there are no bone abnormalities.
- Inexpensive arch supports are available at drugstores. Custom-made arch supports are more expensive and often not needed.
- If your child has one of the rigid types of flatfoot, a visit to a bone and joint specialist (an orthopedic surgeon) may be recommended for further evaluation and treatment.

When should I call your office?

Call our office if your child develops foot pain, trouble wearing shoes, or other symptoms related to flatfoot.