



Feet first

How your child's shoes can influence their health

By CHRISTOPHE CHAMPS, PODO CLINIC AND WORKSHOP

Feet are important. If an adult has foot pain, or back pain, or neck pain, or hip pain, they should get their feet and gait checked by a professional podiatrist and biomechanics expert. If you want to give your child the best chance of avoiding these kinds of problems, pay attention to their shoes now and as they grow, and ensure they know how to choose the right footwear for them.

For them is important, because not all shoes suit every foot. For example, people with a high instep (lump on the top of the foot) should stay away from the Richelieu or Oxford type of dressy flat shoes (for men and women). A Derby type would be more appropriate as their construction method, which is made in quarters, provides an open lacing that will accommodate the higher insteps.

For them is also important because our feet change – even as adults. Feet shape and size may seem static, but they are



influenced by a wide variety of factors. An adult will often size up by 1 to 1.5 in European measurements due to various changes in life, such as the bodyweight, an acquired condition affecting tendons

and ligaments, a neurological disorder, a surgery, a pregnancy, the menopause and much more.

But it's not quite as simple as going for the right shoe size because those numbers vary depending on shoe type, model, brand, manufacture, stitching and materials. Simply knowing the number that was right for one shoe doesn't mean you can automatically apply it to every shoe. Every brand makes so many shoes, using so many different factories in Vietnam, China, Portugal that there is no consistency anymore. So, never trust the number. It's the fit that matters.

How to tell if shoes are the right size

Shoes must strap and protect the feet while offering enough volume and flexibility for the foot to move and swell (and shrink) throughout the day. If the shoes don't feel good in the store, they won't do your child's feet any good afterwards.

Check the length of the shoe using the thumb rule. Place your thumb across the front of the shoe, running parallel to the tips of the toes, and make sure you do not feel any part of the toes. Check that you can't feel the second toe in particular as for some people the second toe is longer than the big toe.

One thing I discovered when selling shoes when I was a student, was the amount of parents who face their child and look for their big toe with their thumb. Anytime the child's second toe is longer than the big toe, they would miss it. This is why we need to turn the thumb and place it transversally along the front of the shoe – so we don't miss a longer toe.

Allow an extra size for running shoes, and less space for football boots where the feeling of the ball is important when playing.

For hiking shoes, since the tongue tends to be attached on both sides and doesn't move around, you must make sure the shoe doesn't feel tight on the top of the foot (above the instep). Always have your child try hiking shoes or boots with thick socks on and then they will have the option to gain more volume with thinner socks on long hikes.

A snug feeling is essential, a tight feeling will hurt. Do not use the very top eyelet on boots when walking uphill on a long distance hike, as this will give the ankle more flexibility. Remember if the ankle cannot flex enough, the knee might have to flex more to compensate. This is not a good thing when walking up slopes/hills. Downhill, use every eyelet to secure the ankle as the foot and ankle are the parts most prone to roll in or out.

Next, check the width and ensure there is enough space around the toe box. Some materials, (plastic, varnished leather, etc.) do not give. These materials press on the ball of the foot and cause pain. Also, if there is stitching around the ball of the foot, it won't allow the material to give and this can also lead to pressure on the forefoot. Basically, it's either a case of the foot misshaping the shoe or the shoe pressing/rubbing onto the foot, affecting the skin and joints (leading to skin build up, metatarsalgia, Morton's toe, bunions, etc.)

If your child's foot is quite narrow, they can still have the support they need by lacing the shoe correctly. Cross the laces to maintain the forefoot and use the "heel lock" lacing method to maintain the heel in place. Make sure shoes are not tightened too much, as this just moves



any foot pain elsewhere on the foot. When it comes to purchasing trainers, skip some of the eyelets above the instep in order to create a window of decompression. This will then support the forefoot and the heel without applying any pressure on the instep.

Finally, always have your child try the shoes before buying them, and do it at the end of the day when the foot gets swollen in size. And always try the shoe with the type of sock that's intended to be worn with the shoes.

These tips are important as ill-fitting shoes can cause a range of problems,

including creating an imbalance in gait and overall body biomechanics. In turn this can lead to pain and make people more susceptible to back, neck and hip problems.

All of the above applies to you too. The best way to encourage your child to look after their feet is to look after yours. Ensure your shoes fits the feet you have now (not the feet you had in your teens). If you have problems, see a professional podiatrist and biomechanics expert. As you will have noticed, having a child involves a lot of running around – make sure you're in the best condition to handle it.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Christophe Champs is a consultant in Podiatry and Biomechanics, and the founder of PODO Clinic and Workshop. Christophe works with clients to help correct postural and biomechanical issues that are causing pain or putting a client at risk of injury. By testing both the moving gait and the still posture Christophe can correct misalignment and asymmetry through creating custom-made orthotics to suit the exact needs of each individual client.

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