

Toe Walking

Information and advice for parents and carers

Paediatric Physiotherapy

What is toe walking?

Toe walking is where the heel makes little or no contact with the floor when standing or walking. This is a normal part of development when a child first begins to walk, however they should quickly grow out of this. If this persists then it is called toe walking.

Toe walking is relatively common and between 7 and 24 out of 100 children experience toe walking.

What are the symptoms of toe walking?

Walking on tiptoes is the main symptom of toe walking. Occasionally a child may also:

- suffer with pain or discomfort
- be more wobbly on their feet
- have a tendency to walk fast or run
- fall over more frequently

What causes toe walking?

The exact cause of toe walking is unknown, but the following can cause toe walking in some children:

- Short calf muscles (lower leg muscles), causing the child to lift their heels up when walking to make it more comfortable.
- Weaker trunk muscles (muscles of the body excluding head and limbs).
- Habit – a child may just get used to toe walking, but over time this can increase the muscle tightness/shortening.
- Neurological (brain) problems.

Toe walking is more common in boys, premature babies and when other members of the family have been toe walkers.

How is toe walking diagnosed?

Toe walking is diagnosed by an assessment which involves looking at your child while they are standing and walking, and assessing their movement and strength.

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How is toe walking treated?

The treatment your child is offered will depend on their specific symptoms and problems and they will be offered the most appropriate treatment for them. Your child's physiotherapist will discuss this with you at the appointment.

1. Activities, stretches and exercises to strengthen the calf, hamstring and/or trunk muscles.
2. Encouraging your child to walk slowly and prompting them to walk with their heels down/feet flat.
3. Activities that encourage your child to put their feet flat.
4. Supportive, well-fastened footwear that can help your child maintain a good foot position and improve their walking pattern.
5. Serial casting – This is where your child's feet are put into plaster casts which are changed every week to slowly stretch out the muscles and increase the movement at the joints. Please see the leaflet 'Serial casting' for more information about this.

What are the benefits of the treatments?

The above treatments can improve your child's walking, reduce other symptoms of toe walking and improve their muscle length.

What are the risks of the treatments?

There is a risk with serial casting that your child could experience dry, itchy skin or rubbing on their skin. There are no risks or side effects to the other treatments.

Are there any alternative treatments?

Appliances to assist the weakened muscles and surgery are possible alternative treatments which your child can be referred for if appropriate.

What are the risks of not getting treatment?

If your child does not have treatment for their toe walking they may continue to walk on their toes into adolescence and adulthood. This usually causes no long-term difficulties but could delay your child's development if their trunk muscles remain weak and they have poor control of their movements.

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Contact details

If you have any questions or concerns about your child's toe walking you can contact:

Paediatric Physiotherapists

0121 507 4569

Monday – Friday, 8.30am – 4.30pm

Further information

For more information about our hospitals and services please see our website:

Sandwell and West Birmingham Hospitals NHS Trust

www.swbh.nhs.uk

Sources used for the information in this leaflet

- Churchill Livingstone, 'The pocket podiatry guide: Paediatrics', January 2010

If you would like to suggest any amendments or improvements to this leaflet please contact the communications department on 0121 507 5420 or email: swb-tr.swbh-gm-patient-information@nhs.net



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