

Strengthening your child's feet



Engelsk

Sundhedstjenesten
(The Health Service)

Egedal
Kommune

Healthy feet are of great importance to our posture, balance, the way we walk and run and other movements. The bones and joints in a small child's feet are soft, but develop as the child learns to stand and walk. Gradually muscles and joints will face larger and larger demands.

Some children complain about fatigue in legs and feet when walking. Others complain when they come home and it is time for bed. Maybe they do not like long field trips where the child is expected to walk for long periods of time.

Flat feet

The foot has two arches, one across the forefoot (transverse) and one along the foot (longitudinal). If the transverse arch is reduced the individual has flat feet. A small child is born with deposits of fat where the arch later develops. The arch develops as muscles and joints in the feet are used and children up to three or four years can seemingly have flat feet without discomfort. Notice e.g. the child's foot print on the floor after showering.

The arch works as a shock absorber for the entire body when we walk, run or jump. For some people, flat feet can therefore result in fatigue and/or pain in the feet, the legs and even the back, and may reduce the urge to move for long distances.

This leaflet is meant as a source of inspiration in helping your child strengthening the muscles in its feet. This will enable your child's endurance when playing and on e.g. field trips.

The exercises are not just for children with endurance problems and possible pain issues. All children may benefit from the exercises as they strengthen the muscles and prevent any later discomfort.

The below suggestion is only effective if the activities are systematised and performed regularly. Try doing one particular activity each day before the child goes to sleep or each day after supper, but in a way that gives the child an actual possibility of strengthening the muscles in its feet. It is a good idea to vary between activities over e.g. a month.

However, it is a condition that your child is motivated and that you are both attentive during the games. Support the child verbally and recognise that the exercises may require your child's full concentration. Play the games together. You may also benefit from the exercise!



Always start by massaging both feet on a ball with soft spikes or a small bouncy ball stimulating muscles and nerve endings.

Warm-up the muscles by cringing the toes hard and then spreading them.



Let the child walk 50-100 pases on its toes. Make sure that the child walks with slightly inward-pointing feet.



Let the child walk 50-100 pases on the outer edge of the foot with cringed toes. Make sure that the child still has the big toe in the floor.

Let the child drag a heavy object using its feet while standing on a not to thick towel.



Let the child move small pieces of a dishcloth from the floor to a basket using one foot at a time.



Let the child pick up its socks from the floor on a daily basis using one foot at a time.

Let the child wring out the water of a sponge after each shower. Remember using boot feet.



The position of the knee:

When a child suffers from a collapsed arch / flat feet it will often affect the position of the knee.

The child will unknowingly pronate the knee during strain which is an undesirable position for the knee.

Let the child pick up items from the floor e.g. pieces from a puzzle, but make the child aware of the position of the knee:

The picture shows the movement that the child will naturally make. The movement is undesirable for the knee joint:



This picture shows the adjusted movement that the child must learn. Both knees must point forward and be above the big toes:



It is also important that both feet are kept flat on the floor.



The child can take indoor walks on 2 dishcloths/small carpet tiles. Try getting the remote control this way. It will strengthen the knees.

Let the child walk both forward and backward up and downstairs.



Both foot and knee joints are strengthened if standing on a wobble board for about five minutes every time the child watches the beginning of "Fjernsyn for dig" (a children's show).

Pay attention that both feet are placed in the middle of the board.

Teach the child to have equal weight on the pulp of both the big toe and little toe.



Valgus foot position

All children can benefit from exercising their feet muscles as suggested above.

However, for some children this is not enough as their heel tendons are also bent, often causing inward angulation. This is called a valgus heel.



In addition to the above exercises these children will also need supporting footwear. This means shoes/boots that:

- are firmly attached to the foot. Teach the child that Velcro must be "pulled and tugged" to be properly attached. Shoes with laces are optimal.
- has a firm counter that cannot be twisted or bend down to the sole. When squeezing the heel, it should only bend downwards slightly.
- has soft soles that are flexible when the foot is bend during movement of the feet.

Out door activities:

Always remember the sensible shoes.

It strengthens the knee to use a scooter, remember to switch legs now and then.

It strengthens the knees to ride a bike – especially up hill.

The child will benefit greatly from jumping over everything: Kerbs first forward, then sideways and backward. Make sure that the child jumps off both feet.

Jump off both feet towards the lamppost, traffic lights, etc.

As the child can jump even further off both feet, let the child jump on and of e.g. the bottom step, sand boxes and other stable things.

Use nature.

Take frequent walks in the woods, go to the beach and the like. The uneven and rolling terrain, hills, etc. is perfect training grounds for you child.

Have fun!

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