

# Children's Feet

## Helping to Mold Feet for the Future

### Benefits of Foot Orthotics for Children

From a medical perspective children cannot be treated like smaller versions of their parents – and neither can their feet. Foot orthotics for children present a unique opportunity to control the growth and development of the foot. You may be familiar with orthotic therapy because you yourself have a diagnosis or problem related to your feet. Many common foot problems are thought to have a genetic component and that genetic component plays a crucial role in the development of your child's feet. Since most adult feet are too flat, correcting for this tendency early on in your child's feet can prevent or at least limit the development of flat feet as they grow up. Researchers have found that giving correctional foot support to children between the ages of two and five years of age can significantly improve mature foot development. After age five, correctional support can help but no longer changes the basic structure of the foot.

Considering the growing number of children increasing their activity levels and entering organized sports at a young age, the need for early and effective foot support is more important than ever. The possibility of improved outcomes when your child is skeletally mature, and the prevention of future problems are great reasons to consider having your child evaluated for custom foot orthotics.

### Common Problems Helped by Orthotic Therapy

Research has shown that the early use of foot orthotics in children can have beneficial results that can be seen clinically and on an x-ray (1, 2). Problems with foot development and biomechanics can eventually lead to problems higher up in the ankles, knees and hips. Some common problems that can be addressed with a foot orthotic include flatfoot, the over-pronated foot, torsional deformities of the lower leg, juvenile



*Your child's feet will very likely be like your own because of genetic inheritance. If you have flat feet or a condition related to fallen arches, your child may benefit from early use of good, custom orthotic support.*

bunions and other biomechanical inefficiencies of the foot.

### What Will My Child Feel?

In all likelihood your child will adapt wonderfully to his or her new orthotics. As we know, the ligaments and bone structures of a child have a unique ability to adapt to new or corrected positions, and their feet are no different. A **biomechanical** custom foot orthotic is different than other custom orthotics in that it is precisely calibrated to your child's foot. This means that the orthotic is designed based on your child's foot type and weight to provide just the right amount of flexibility. Tolerance issues in children are extremely rare.

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Once a baby starts to walk, they need all the help they can get with their floppy feet!

### Common Parental Concerns

**Q** - My child is growing, how often will I have to replace the orthotics?

**A** - When your child is undergoing rapid growth, his or her orthotics will need to be replaced approximately every 2 shoe sizes, or every 1-2 years. We understand the financial considerations involved with your child's health and have a wonderful *outgrowth policy* (see below) that makes it affordable to change the orthotic prescription in response to your child's improvements in growth and development. Reevaluation of your child as he or she develops will often lead to changes in the orthotic prescription.

**Q** - Will my child become dependent on orthotics and have to wear them for the rest of his or her life?

**A** - Just as your child presents with unique clinical situations, his or her orthotic is a unique and custom device. Some problems can be prevented without lifelong wear, some developmental problems may require longer term use, and some children would simply benefit from prevention their whole lives. Consider the use of eyeglasses in children. The concern that a child will become dependent on the prescription eye-wear is not a valid reason to dismiss the

correction needed to improve visual function. In addition, your doctor may prescribe exercises for the foot to give your child every opportunity to develop a muscularly sound foot.

**Q** - If my child is not complaining of any pain, why would we have to treat it?

**A** - This is probably one of the toughest questions that every parent must answer when it comes to their child's health. It also represents one of the biggest shortcomings of our health care system, and illustrates the view that "If it ain't broke, why fix it?". Or alternatively, "Whatever the problem is, the child will outgrow it". This is an individual decision that every parent has to make with the assistance of their health care provider. Considerations in this decision should include the preventative payoffs for instituting such therapy weighed against any potential down-side which is often primarily financial.

### Orthotic Outgrowth Policy

As your child grows and develops, their biomechanical needs and orthotic prescription will change. We understand the financial decisions are a part of your child's health care and offer an outgrowth policy available with your child's orthotics. This renewable policy allows for the purchase of additional orthotics as your child grows at significantly reduced prices. This 3 year policy is renewable up to your child's 18th birthday and is a great way to ensure proper orthotic therapy in the developing years without breaking the bank. Talk to your healthcare provider for more details.

### References

- 1) Bleck, EE; Berzins UJ, Conservation Management of Pes Valgus with plantarflexed talus flexible. Clin. Orthop. Relat. Res. 1977; (122):85-94.
- 2) Bordelon, RL, Correction of Hypermobile Flatfoot in Children by Molded Insert. Foot and Ankle. 1980; 1(3):143-150.