

SHOES: WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

When your child begins to walk, you may wonder about choosing the right shoes. Shoes protect the feet, provide warmth, and play a role in fashion. In the past, shoes for children were designed with the belief that the child's foot required support. Support is not necessary for a child to learn to walk nor is support a function of shoes. "Special," "orthopedic," or "corrective" shoes can cause problems or foot deformities and have no proven benefit for the average child.

Babies should not wear shoes until they begin to walk. Worn earlier, shoes can interfere with the growth of the feet.

When walking in the home, barefoot is best. Shoes do not help the child learn to walk. The progression from standing to walking will develop without the aid of shoes.

Beware of well-meaning advice from family, friends, and shoe salesmen. The best footwear should have the following characteristics:

- Proper fit – If the shoe is too short, the toes will be compressed and may become deformed. If the shoe is too long, the child will be more likely to trip and fall.
- "Boxlike" – The shape of the shoe should be "boxlike" with a square toe to allow adequate space for the toes and conform to the shape of the normal foot.
- Flexible soles – so the foot can move freely.
- Made of porous material – to allow the skin to breathe and to prevent irritation or fungal infections from trapped moisture.
- Slip-proof soles – Sole friction should be similar to that of the bare foot; excessive friction should be avoided to prevent tripping.
- Light weight.
- Extend above the ankle – to prevent the shoe from slipping off, not for ankle support.

If you have any questions regarding these recommendations, feel free to ask your pediatrician or nurse practitioner.

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