

Flexible Flat Feet

INTRODUCTION

Your child has been diagnosed with flexible flat feet, which is also called pes planus. When your child is standing, the feet appear flat and without an arch.

This is a very common, normal, condition which rarely requires treatment. Attempts to create an arch with

expensive shoes, braces, orthotics, or surgery are unsuccessful and often create problems rather than "cure" an otherwise normal and well functioning flat foot.



BACKGROUND

Flexible flat feet are feet that have normal bones and joints in the arch of the foot. However, due to loose or stretchy ligaments, the arches flatten with the pressure of standing. Loose ligaments, which is sometime referred to as being "double jointed" may be isolated to the feet, but more often is present in all joints. It may be something that runs in your family. Kids are generally more stretchable than adults and they generally tighten up with growth and development to become like their parents. If mom or dad have loose ligaments as adults, then the kids are likely to end up somewhere like mom or dad or somewhere in between. The age of which this tightening up occurs is variable and may not occur until adolescence.

DIAGNOSIS

A simple test for loose ligaments is to see how far your index finger bends backwards. Kids with loose ligaments will bend backward 90 degrees without discomfort. Another test is to see if the wrist and thumb will flex and touch the forearm as shown in the picture.

A simple test to determine if your child has good foot bones and joints is to have them stand on tiptoes and look for the arch to appear. If an arch is not present, your child may have "rigid flat feet" and your physician will determine the cause and need for treatment.



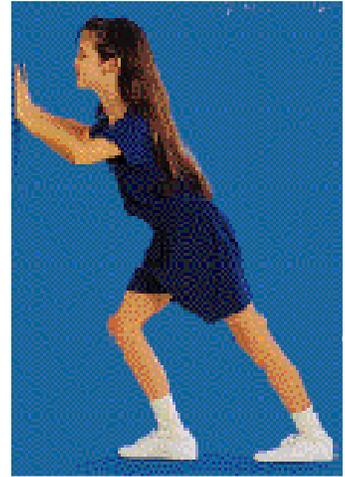
TREATMENT

Flexible flat feet generally do not require treatment. With observation and time, most children will gradually tighten up their loose ligaments and naturally develop more of an arch to their feet. Whether or not this happens, almost all flexible flat feet function well for all activities. Flexible flat feet are not any more (or less) likely to develop future foot problems, such as arthritis, tendonitis, or deformities.

PROBLEMS

Some children with flat feet develop achy pain in the foot, ankle, or calf. Children with symptomatic flat feet are usually found to have very tight hamstring and calf muscles. Daily stretching will gradually reduce the tightness and most children will have significant improvement in their pain. For children who remain symptomatic despite stretching, soft arch supports may provide additional relief. These arch supports do not correct the foot.

Some feet with extreme looseness of the ligaments will develop calluses in the midfoot and have frequent ankle sprains. Usually aggressive bracing can help, but is often insufficient to control the extreme looseness. For these feet, surgery to realign and fuse the bone in the hind foot, can improve foot function. This is rarely needed and used only as a last resort.



ANSWERS TO COMMON QUESTIONS

1. Flexible flat feet are a common, painless condition.
2. Corrective shoes or supports are an UNNECESSARY expense and will not improve flexible flat feet. Shoe sales persons may tell you expensive shoes will help your child walk better or to develop an arch, but this is not true. The best recommendation for shoes is to get shoes that fit and protect, and in cold climates, shoes that keep the feet warm.
3. Symptomatic flat feet are often associated with tight calf muscles and often improve with a good stretching program.

MORE INFORMATION

Further information can be obtained on the internet. Your local public library can help you if you are interested. Two good sites for expert and peer reviewed information are the American Academy of Orthopedic Surgeons at www.aaos.org and www.emedicine.com.

FEEDBACK

If you have questions or comments, please contact the office or submit them to the web site at www.pedortho.com.