

# Starting Your Child Off On The Right Foot

## *Top Ten Tips For Treating Children's Feet*

As more and more celebrities mix stardom and motherhood, celebrity women these days not only need to worry about the shoes they wear on the red carpet, but also about the health of the little feet pitter patter behind them. However, like navigating through the paparazzi, addressing children's foot care can be extremely challenging.

Indeed, the human foot is one of the most complicated parts of the body with twenty-eight bones, thirty-three joints, 107 ligaments and nineteen muscles. Combined, the fifty-six bones in the feet make up about one quarter of all the bones in a baby's precious body. According to the American Podiatric Medical Association (APMA), it is important for parents to pay close attention to their children's feet from the beginning.

"Young children's feet are soft and pliable and any abnormal pressure can easily cause deformities, which will inevitably impact the way a child walks and ultimately functions," says APMA member Dr. Jane Andersen.

With so much to know about every part of a child's body, the APMA offers the following top ten tips for ensuring successful development and optimal foot health for your child's feet throughout the years:

### **THE EARLY YEARS**

Children's feet grow rapidly during the first year, reaching almost half their adult foot size. APMA foot specialists consider the first year to be the most important in the development of a child's feet.

1. Look carefully at your baby's feet. If you notice something that does not look normal, seek professional care immediately. Problems noticed at birth will not disappear by themselves. Don't wait until the child begins to walk to take care of a problem you noticed earlier.
2. Cover your baby's feet loosely. Tight covers restrict movement and can retard normal development.
3. Be careful about applying home remedies to children's feet, as preparations strong enough to kill certain types of fungus can also harm a child's skin.
4. To prevent your baby from getting a painful ingrown toenail, trim toenails straight across. If the toenail becomes infected (red or swollen) see a podiatrist right away.
5. When the child first begins to walk, shoes are not necessary for walking indoors. Allowing the youngster to walk barefoot or to wear just socks helps the foot to grow normally and to develop its musculature and strength, as well as the grasping action of toes. Of course, when walking outside or on rough surfaces, babies' feet should be protected in lightweight, flexible footwear made of natural materials.

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### **SCHOOL AGE CHILDREN**

After a child has been walking for a few years, his/her feet continue to grow and become stronger. At this stage, parents should continue to watch the development of their child's feet and help them learn the importance of taking care of his/her own feet for premium performance and health.

6. Remember that your child's lack of complaining does not necessarily mean that all is well. The bones of growing feet are so flexible that they can be twisted and distorted without the child being aware of it. Start the school year off by visiting the podiatrist for a foot check-up.
7. Have your child's feet measured every time you purchase new shoes, as children's feet change size rapidly. Look at the shoe to be sure it has a firm heel counter (stiff material on either side of the heel), adequate cushioning of the insole, and a built-in arch. It should be flexible enough to bend where the foot bends—at the ball of the foot, not in the middle of the shoe. New shoes should be comfortable from the beginning and should not have to be broken in.
8. According to the podiatrists at the APMA, walking is the best form of exercise. They recommend that children's walking patterns be carefully observed. For example, does the child have knock knees? Do his/her toes point in or out? Or, are there other gait abnormalities? These problems can be corrected if they are detected early.
9. Walking barefoot is a healthy activity for children under the right conditions. However, walking barefoot on dirty pavements exposes children's feet to infection through accidental cuts and to severe contusions, sprains or fractures. Another potential problem is plantar warts, a condition caused by a virus which invades the sole of the foot through cuts and breaks in the skin. They require protracted treatment and can keep children from school and other activities.
10. As a child's feet continue to develop, it may be necessary to change shoe and sock sizes every few months to allow room for the feet to grow. Although foot problems result mainly from injury, deformity, illness, or hereditary factors, improper footwear can aggravate preexisting conditions. Shoes or other footwear should never be handed down from one child to another.

Whenever you have questions about your child's foot health contact a podiatrist in your area. For more information, and to find a list of podiatric physicians near you, log on to [www.APMA.org](http://www.APMA.org) or call 1-800-FOOTCARE.

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