

FOOTPRINTS

An Informational Newsletter for Patients of APMA Member Podiatrists

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Children can suffer from a wide variety of foot and ankle conditions, from congenital deformities, to inherited biomechanical issues, to infections and injuries.

"Children, for the most part, want to play and be involved in physical activity," said Mitzi Williams, DPM, a member of the American Podiatric Medical Association (APMA) and the American College of Foot and Ankle Pediatrics (ACFAP). "It's our goal as podiatrists to keep them healthy, active, and happy."

We asked Dr. Williams and Louis DeCaro, DPM, APMA member and ACFAP president, to share with us a few common pediatric foot and ankle symptoms that should raise a red flag for parents. Read on for more, then see the reverse side for our experts' advice about how to prevent foot and ankle problems in children and when to seek treatment from a podiatric physician.

SYMPTOM: Heel pain, worse with activity
COULD BE: Sever's Disease



In children, the heel is still growing, and the growth plate can become inflamed with overuse, especially among kids who play sports such as soccer or basketball. This condition is called calcaneal apophysitis, or Sever's Disease.



SYMPTOMS: Shin splints, knee pain, hip pain

COULD BE: A biomechanical issue of the foot



"Many kids suffer from mechanical dysfunction in the foot," said Dr. DeCaro. "Especially with kids in sports, they'll have a chief complaint in the leg like shin splints or knee pain, coming from poor mechanics in the foot. If you change the biomechanics of the foot with an appropriate orthotic, the pain elsewhere goes away."

SYMPTOMS: Lack of endurance, fatigue, lethargy

COULD BE: A foot that flattens with weight-bearing

If your child struggles with speed or endurance in sports and other physical activity, take a look at their feet. "If you have a foot that flattens out when you put weight on it, even if it has a nice arch when you're sitting," Dr. DeCaro said, "it's analogous to running on a soft sand beach, and that excessive motion and energy expenditure can cause trouble."

SYMPTOM: Hard, flat bump on the sole of the foot

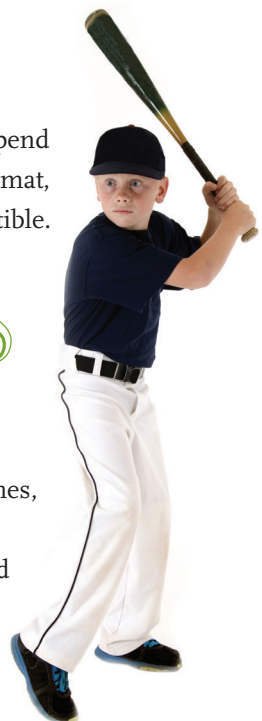
COULD BE: Plantar wart

Warts are caused by a virus, and kids who spend time barefoot (on a pool deck, a gymnastics mat, or in a locker room shower) are very susceptible. While warts are harmless, they can become painful and can spread easily.

SYMPTOM: Redness, swelling, and pain around the big toenail

COULD BE: Ingrown toenail

Usually, toenails grow straight out. Sometimes, however, one or both corners or sides curve and grow into the flesh, causing redness and irritation. Shoe pressure can contribute to this problem, so parents should be sure children are wearing properly fitted shoes.



FOOTPRINTS

HOW CAN YOU KEEP YOUR KIDS' FEET AND ANKLES HEALTHY?

★ WEAR THE RIGHT SHOES FOR THE RIGHT ACTIVITY.



Basketball shoes, for example, are constructed with the lateral movements of that sport in mind. Running shoes provide shock absorption. Be sure your child is wearing the proper footwear for their chosen activity.

★ EXAMINE SHOES FOR FIT AND WEAR.



Some kids wear out a pair of shoes before they need a bigger size. Some grow so quickly that their shoes need to be replaced with surprising frequency. Keep an eye on both to ensure tight or worn shoes aren't creating a problem for your child's feet.

★ PAY ATTENTION TO CONDITIONING.



Be sure your child stretches before significant activity, especially when starting a new sports season or in cold weather when muscles may be tight.

★ BE ALERT TO CHANGES IN BEHAVIOR.



Kids don't always complain of pain but may withdraw from activities they typically enjoy or complain of being too tired to be active.

★ KEEP YOUR OWN FOOT HEALTH IN MIND.



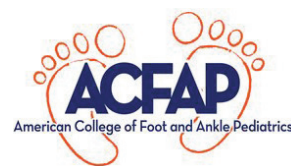
Foot structure is inherited. If you have "problem feet," it's more likely your child will, as well. Consider an appointment with a podiatrist for a foot health screening to determine if they suffer from underlying biomechanical issues. Dr. Williams also cautions that children who have preexisting conditions should be regularly evaluated to ensure their feet and ankles remain healthy after treatment.

Families and caregivers should reach out when children complain of pain, functional changes, or changes in foot position. A physician who specializes in the pediatric lower extremity is key. Various foot types require specific modes of support, physical therapy efforts, and conditioning.

— Dr. Williams

A podiatrist specializes in the foot and ankle, and podiatrists with a focus on pediatrics are the best trained physicians and surgeons to understand your child's feet and the role growth and development will play in their overall foot health.

To learn more or to find a podiatrist near you, visit www.apma.org/KeepKidsActive.



Dr. DeCaro is a podiatric physician who specializes in pediatrics with a special interest in sports medicine and biomechanics. He is president of ACFAP and in private practice in West Hatfield, MA.



Dr. Williams specializes in pediatric foot and ankle surgery and is in practice with Kaiser Permanente in San Francisco.

Doctors of podiatric medicine are podiatric physicians and surgeons. They are also known as podiatrists, and are qualified by their education, training, and experience to diagnose and treat conditions affecting the foot, ankle, and related structures of the leg.



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