Podiatry Services
Patient Information Leaflet

Flat Feet in Children
(V2 November 2026)

What are flat feet?
Most adult feet have an arch along the inside edge of the foot. Flat feet are when this arch appears absent or reduced in standing.

The arches may ‘reappear’ when your child is sitting or if your child stands on their tiptoes. Before the age of 5 most children have flat feet, as the arch on the inside of the foot does not begin to develop until after this age. The typical flat foot is flexible, and most children have no symptoms. Even in older children, flat feet do not usually cause any problems.

What causes flat feet?
The many bones in the feet are held together by stretchy bands called ligaments. Flat feet are usually due to loose or soft ligaments and baby fat between the foot bones. This causes the arch to fall when your child stands up which is why flat feet are sometimes called “fallen arches”.

The typical flat foot is flexible and most children have no symptoms. Flat feet can occasionally be caused by tight muscles, which is more likely to cause pain.

Will my child need treatment?
If your child does not have any associated problems with their flat feet then they are unlikely to need treating.

Many people have a long -standing belief that flat feet are abnormal and require treatment with special shoes, insoles or even splints or braces.

We now know that the majority of children between 1-5 years of age have flat feet. This is part of normal development of their feet and over 95% will develop a normal arch.

The other 5% continue to have flat feet, but only a small number will ever have a problem. Most children with persistent flat feet participate in physical activities, including competitive sports, and experience no pain or other symptoms. It is less important how your foot looks as to how it functions.

However, if your child complains of foot, ankle or knee pain, has poor balance or poor stamina in walking, then a referral to see a Podiatrist may be necessary. They can then assess the problem and treat as required.

What kind of treatment is there?
Treatment for more severe or painful flat feet can consist of exercises and/or stretches for your child to do. It can also include providing insoles to put in your child's shoes.

Most children with painless flexible flat feet do not need any treatment. Insoles will not change the shape of the foot and are therefore not a 'cure'; they simply hold the foot in a better position so that it can work more effectively and may help reduce some of the symptoms.

If you have any questions about the information in this leaflet, please contact Podiatry Services. Further information about the service and how to manage a range of foot health problems yourself, can also be found on our website:
www.livewellsouthwest.co.uk/project/podiatry

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