

Bow Legs and Knock Knees in Children

Fact Sheet

Bow legs and knock knees are common in children. They can become more obvious as a toddler begins to walk. Bow legs and knock knees are a normal part of growth. The leg position changes over time as children grow.

Bow legs (genu varum)

Bow legs is when the legs curve outwards when standing and the knees are wide apart (Fig. 1). Leg position changes are a normal part of development as children grow. Babies are born with bow legs due to their compacted position in the uterus, but this is generally not noticeable until walking age. Once the child is walking the legs begin to straighten and are usually straight by 3 years of age. This is often followed by a period of knock knees.



Figure 1 Bow legs, when the feet and ankles are together, the knees remain apart

Knock Knees (genu valgum)

Knock knees is when a child stands and their knees are together and the feet and ankles remain apart (Fig. 2). Knock knees are common in children aged 3-8 years old. Usually, alignment corrects and the legs become straighter with growth by 8-10 years of age. However, some children's knees do not correct until adolescence.

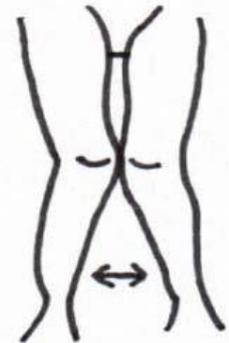


Figure 2 Knock knees, when the knees are together, the feet and ankles remain apart

Treatments

Children's legs normally correct themselves with growth. Special shoes, bracing and splints are not recommended. If you are concerned about your child's legs, you can take a photo of your child standing with their knees facing forward. No treatment is required unless the condition is severe or there is an underlying cause which needs to be treated. Surgery is rarely required and only when the child is of upper primary school age.

Summary

Bow legs and knock knees are normal in children as they grow. Visit your child's doctor for a specialist referral if:

- Your child has a limp or pain in their legs,
- Only one leg is affected,
- Your child's bow legs/knock knees are severe or rapidly getting worse,
- Bow legs worsen after 3 years of age,
- Knock knees persist after 8-10 years of age,
- The child is unusually short for their age.

For more information

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Revised December 2024



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