

Toe Walking

Fact sheet

Persistent toe walking is when a child walks on tip toes without heels touching the ground. Toe walking in young children is not a serious condition and often resolves itself.

When learning to walk, children often take a few steps on their toes and then return to balancing on flat feet and this can be part of normal development. Toe walking should resolve spontaneously within the first year of walking and should not occur continuously. Older children should not walk on their toes and should be able to stand and balance with flat feet.



Cause

There are some conditions where children do walk on their toes. However, in many cases the actual cause of the problem is unknown, and children are diagnosed with Idiopathic Toe Walking.

Symptoms

Children that toe walk may have no symptoms, but some children may complain of aching or painful legs. There may be some tightness in the calf muscle that cause some children to walk on their toes.

Treatment options

Various treatments for toe walking include inserts in shoes, stretches, splints, serial casting to stretch tight muscles or monitoring to see if the child comes down onto their heels given time as they grow. Families play a very important role in the management of toe walking by monitoring walking patterns and exercises. Physiotherapists can teach stretches and encourage activities like toe walking and balancing to help children walk with heels on the ground. In more severe cases physiotherapists might recommend serial casting to apply a constant stretch to the calf muscles and change the casts regularly over a few weeks.

Surgical management is also an option for older children that continue to toe walk.

This would be recommended for:

- Adolescent children,
- Reoccurred toe walking following plaster treatment,
- The tightness is severe.

Surgery consists of three small cuts in the skin and tendons to lengthen the tendon. A below knee cast is then applied for 4-6 weeks following this surgery.

Visit your child's doctor for a specialist referral if:

- If your child remains walking on their toes past the age of two,
- If your child can't stand with their feet flat,
- If toe walking only involves one side.

For more information

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