

Making Sure Shoes and Socks Fit To Prevent Foot Injuries

Buying shoes for your child that fit properly is extremely important. Unfortunately, a recent study found that a majority of kids wear shoes that are too small, which put them at risk for developing serious foot deformities, such as bunions.

If the shoe fits

Experts in foot and ankle health say that parents should remember the following when shopping for their children's shoes:

- **Shop at the end of the day:** Shop when your child's feet are at their largest (either at the end of the day, or after a run or sporting event).
- **Measure both feet, standing up:** Measure your child's feet when they are standing up bearing their full weight. Measure both feet in case they vary in size. Choose the shoes that fit the larger foot.
- **Measure and fit with sports-specific socks.** Your child should be wearing the sock that they will ultimately wear with the shoes. Note: This is a reversal of the normal fitting process in most athletic shoe stores, where socks are purchased as an "add-on" after shoes have been fitted. Ones that are padded are ideal.
- **Allow for wiggle room:** There should be a half-inch from the end of the longest toe to the end of the shoe so that your child is able to wiggle all of her toes. Don't press with your thumb on the greater toe to estimate fit because it activates a reflex that causes your child to curl the bigger toe, giving the wrong impression that there is enough space. In an ideal world, the length of the shoe should exceed the actual length of your child's foot by at least 10 millimeters to ensure that enough space is provided for the greater and lesser toes.
- **Lace the shoes properly:** For maximum support, **use the top eyelet on the shoe** and run the laces through twice for a snugger fit. Don't tie the laces too tightly, or too loosely. A loose fit can cause the foot to turn while inside the shoe which might result in ankle injury.
- **Check for snug heels:** If the heels don't fit snugly, they will pull up out of the shoe (pistoning) and your child will be more likely to get blisters.
- **Have your child walk in the shoes:** Allow your child some time to walk around the store in the shoes and ask them how the shoes feel. When she takes them off, check her feet for any red spots or areas of irritation. Inspect the inside of the shoe for any extra material, glue or irregular stitching, which may cause chafing.
- **Expect immediate comfort:** Most importantly, the shoes should be comfortable *right away*. Shoes shouldn't need to be "broken in" to feel right.

Selecting the right shoe also means picking the right kind of shoe:

- **The best materials:** Leather, suede and canvas are the most durable and breathable materials for athletic shoes. Synthetic materials don't allow the foot to "breathe" and may even contribute to skin diseases and foot odor.
- **Choose the proper shoe for a particular sport:** Shoes are designed specifically based on the demands of that sport. For instance, running shoes are designed for forward movement and have extra cushioning, while tennis shoes are meant to support side-to-side motion.