



General Information

The arch in a person's foot helps support the body when a person stands or walks. The term flatfoot refers to a fairly common condition in which there is no arch. This condition can be either flexible or rigid. In flexible flatfoot, the arch can be seen when the foot is not bearing any weight or while walking on the toes. In a rigid flatfoot condition, the arch is never visible.

Before age 3, all children appear to have flat feet. That's because a pad of fat in the instep hides the arch between the heel and the ball of the foot. As children get older, the fat disappears and the arch should become visible. How long it takes for the fat to disappear varies, and so a child is seldom diagnosed as having flexible flatfoot before the age of 6.

With rigid flatfoot, deformities in the foot can be often seen from birth, and so the diagnosis may be made earlier.

Causes of Flatfoot?

Lax ligaments in a child's foot cause flexible flatfoot. Because they are lax, the arch flattens when weight is put on the foot. This condition often runs in families. It is also particularly common with other conditions, such as Down's syndrome, in which the muscles are lax in the entire body.

Rigid flat foot can be caused by abnormal foot development. This could be the result of a congenital condition that affects the foot. Or it could also be associated with other conditions such as cerebral palsy.

Symptoms of Flatfoot?

Most children who are diagnosed with flexible flatfoot have no symptoms and experience no loss of function. Diagnosis often results from concerns parents have about the way the foot looks. Some children may complain of pain along the arch region after lengthy activity or after playing in sports.

Rigid flatfoot can be painful. Congenital deformities, such as a flaring of the heel, are usually visible at birth. The foot will be very rigid. At around age 10 rigid flatfoot will cause the child to complain of foot pain during activities.



Treatment

Flexible flatfoot will often improve as a child gets older and the ligaments in the foot grow and change. If there are no symptoms such as pain or other problems, corrective footwear should not be used. If pain is persistent in children and adolescents with flexible flatfoot, special arch supports may help. Often, buying footwear with good arch supports is all that is needed. If the problem continues, though, there are specially designed supports and footwear your doctor may recommend. Arch supports do not cure or reverse the condition. They do, though, help prevent it from getting worse.

The rigid flatfoot often requires corrective surgery.