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# Selecting Children's Shoes

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Children like fashionable shoes that are similar to those their friends wear. While shoes that are in fashion make boys and girls happy, be certain that the shoes purchased also make for happy feet. Careful fit, good design and proper construction are important. Many adults' foot problems can be traced to outgrown, hand-me-down and incorrectly shaped shoes that forced their feet out of shape when they were children.

In many families, a large portion of the clothing budget is spent on shoes. Parents justify this high cost as a type of "insurance" for good foot health.

Examine your child's shoes. Do they fit properly? Are they correctly shaped? Are they well made? The shoes and socks you choose for your child can help to encourage growth of healthy feet, or they may lay the foundation for lifelong foot troubles.

## The Foot at Birth

At birth, a baby's foot is just starting to develop. Of the 26 bones in the foot, the heel bone develops from two or more centers that join at age 16 or older to form one complete bone. The other bones of the foot are small and fragmented looking. They will be completely formed at about the same age as the heel bone. Muscles and ligaments are weak, and the nervous system that power the muscles is in the early stages of development. As the foot matures,

cartilage is gradually replaced by calcium and phosphorus to form hard, adult bone. Ligaments and muscles strengthen to stabilize the foot. Knowledge of this fragile structure carries a warning of responsibility to parents.

## The Infant

Kicking and toe wiggling are natural exercises that develop muscles and prepare your infant for walking. Until your baby stands alone, he doesn't need any foot covering, except perhaps for warmth.

Anything you put on an infant's feet should be soft and roomy. Socks and booties should have broad toes and adequate length. Don't use them if they shrink too much in laundering because a baby's foot is very pliable. Anything that alters its natural course of development may cause permanent damage.

## The Toddler

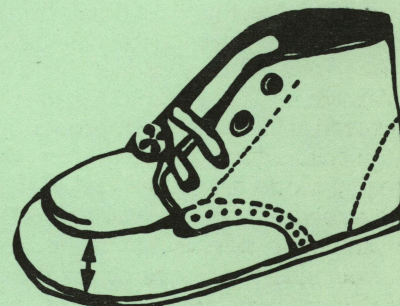
When your toddler first stands unaided, he needs shoes that will protect his feet and provide a stable standing base. His first shoe, often called a "pre-walker," should have a soft, flexible, full-cut leather upper and a thin ( $\frac{1}{8}$  inch) flexible leather sole.

Always a big event is when your baby takes that first step. Never try to force your toddler to stand or to walk. He will stand when the nervous system, bones, muscles and tendons of his feet and legs are developed enough to support his body weight.

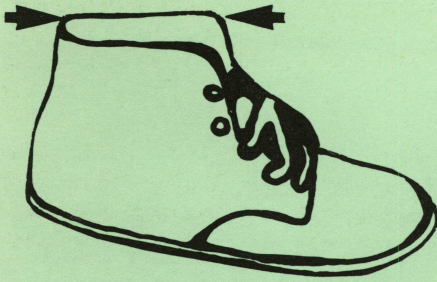
Many parents ask if they should put a high top shoe on their child's foot. Check with your doctor for his advice on this question.



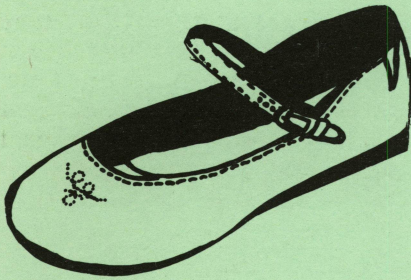
A child's shoe should be soft, flexible and should provide plenty of toe room. Oxfords allow ankle muscles to strengthen but are easier for a child to remove.



High top shoes generally are not needed for ankle support. If you decide to put your toddler in them, be sure the tops are soft and flexible enough to permit the ankle to bend naturally. Make sure the shoe has adequate toe height.



This shoe is cut too skimpily and does not provide enough toe room.



Mary Janes and similar styles are acceptable for dressy occasions but should not be worn continuously. These styles tend to be stiff, provide less toe room than oxfords and are often hard for the child to keep on.

### The Older Child

When a child begins to run about, he needs a sturdier shoe. This shoe should have firmness in the sole and counter, flexibility and adequate toe room.

The counter (stiffening that holds the heel area of the shoe erect) prevents the child's heel from slipping around as he walks and runs. A 1/4-inch leather sole and 1/4- to 3/8-inch heel heights are good choices at this stage of development.

### Growth

Children's feet grow at a surprisingly fast rate. Sometimes the feet can change a whole size within a month. Since the bones are still developing, feet can be squeezed into shoes of improper size and shape and not give pain. Don't wait for the child to tell you his feet hurt; he probably won't. A regular check for correct shoe size is important. The following chart prepared by the American Foot Care Institute serves as a guide for foot growth.

Age	Check shoe size every
2 to 6 years	1 to 2 months
6 to 10 years	2 to 3 months
10 to 12 years	3 to 4 months
12 to 15 years	4 to 5 months
15 to 20 years	6 months

### Construction Features

**Material:** Firm but pliable. Should allow feet to breathe.

**Heels:** Sturdy. Absorb sound and shock.

**Heel counter:** Firm, springs back after being pressed down. Holds heel in place.



**Heel counter**  
Firm, springs back after being pressed down.



**Shank:** Firm but flexible. Supports arch.

**Linings:** Smooth. Covered seams. No rough edges. Absorbs perspiration.

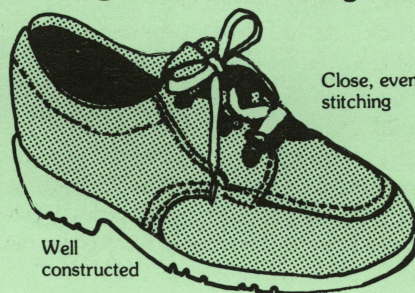
**Welt:** Holds upper to sole. Helps make waterproof.

**Well finished:** No raw edges or bulky stitching. No exposed tacks.

**Sole:** Firm but flexible. Rough surface for toddlers.



**Stitching:** Close, even. Strong thread.



**Well constructed**

Close, even stitching

**Last:** Straight shape with top of shoe lined up with sole.

**Label:** Required to list materials used.

Quality and good fit are easier to get if you trade with a retailer who stocks a variety of lengths, widths and brands. Some stores keep a continuous record of the child's foot growth and dates of shoe purchases.

Shop where sales personnel are trained to fit children's shoes. A sales person can measure for length and width but needs to consider the girth of your child's foot. A trained salesperson can judge fit by feeling the foot through the shoe upper.

### Shoes for the Occasion

Footwear is chosen for the season and occasion. Shoe quality should be appropriate for the intended use. School and play shoes should be of better quality than dress shoes that are worn less often and for shorter periods of time.

Shoe weight should be appropriate for the season and the child's strength. The desire to purchase durable shoes may cause a parent to buy shoes that are too heavy for the child.

### Shoes for Summer

Children often kick off their school shoes at the first sign of warm weather and spend the rest of the summer barefooted or in lightweight play shoes. There is nothing wrong with going barefoot. Walking without shoes allows the toes to extend and grip the ground, one of the best foot exercises there is, providing it is done on soft grass, sand or carpet where no danger exists of stepping on broken glass, nails, pins or other sharp objects.

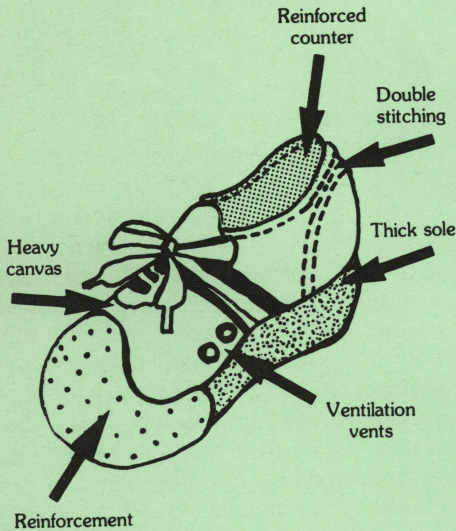
If your child plays on concrete or other hard or rocky surfaces, a foot covering is needed. Choose a shoe that has a thick, resilient sole to help young feet take the pounding they get during active play. Rubber is best on concrete because it adds a shock absorbing quality to footwear that protects the feet from severe jarring. Rubber soled tennis shoes are specially designed for gymnasium floors or tennis courts. They protect the playing surfaces and give the foot more traction.

### What About Sneakers?

Sneakers, if of good quality, give greater freedom for the feet to develop. They provide good resiliency. For nor-

mal feet, they have a comfortable shape. When shopping for sneakers, be sure they:

- Are well-fitted.
- Are of heavy canvas.
- Are well-constructed with double stitching.
- Have an arch support.
- Have rubber reinforcement at toe and heel.
- Have a thick, resilient sole.
- Have reinforced heel counters.
- Have ventilation vents.



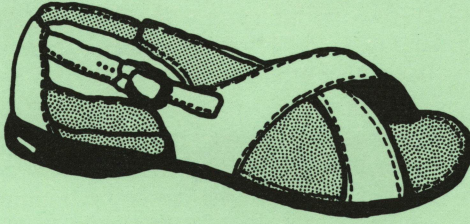
Parents should be aware that rubber soles may puncture, that canvas does not "breathe," that sneakers have less depth in the toe area and that sneakers should be kept clean. Also, parents tend to buy sneakers too small or shrink sneakers when they are washed.



Avoid low cut or slip-on canvas shoes that are often fitted short to help them stay on the foot. Thin soles do not adequately protect young feet for active wear.

### What About Sandals?

A sandal that is well-fitted allows freedom for the feet to develop naturally. Contrary to popular belief, they do not make the feet spread. Sandals for children, especially for play, should have closed backs and wide straps for safety and greater durability. Straps on sandals should be adjustable.



### School Shoes

The end of summer means new shoe time. School shoes are worn almost every day, so carefully follow the suggestions given to help you get the best fit, construction and style for your



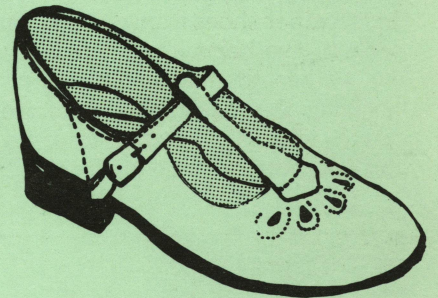
child's feet. Your child's shoes can affect the way he performs in the classroom and participates on the play-

ground. Even if last year's school shoes still look good, be sure to thoroughly check their fit on your child's feet. Young feet grow rapidly over the summer months.

Loafers cut high in the vamp area stay on the feet better than low cut ones. Many styles also have elastic across the instep to help keep the shoe in place.

### Dressup Shoes

Shoes that are chosen for dressy occasions often are **not** the type of shoe that should be worn continuously. These styles tend to be stiff and generally provide less toe room than oxfords or other casual shoes. Often they are low-cut and difficult to keep on. Patent leather frequently is used in dress shoes. It is a hard leather that causes feet to perspire and become tender.



Mary Janes are dressy shoes. They should be worn only for short periods of time.

### How To Save Money

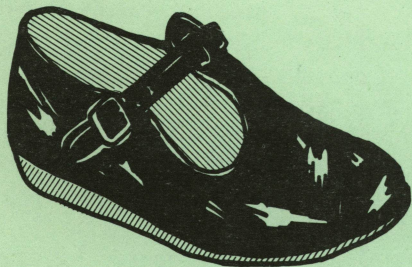
- Avoid slip-ons that break down easily.



- Avoid narrow straps that break easily.
- Avoid high heel lifts which are impractical and unsafe.



- Avoid black patent, bone or colored shoes that show scuffs.



- Avoid poor quality shoes that quickly lose their shape.

**Remember**, purchase well-constructed and well-fitted shoes.

### Caring for Shoes

Proper care of your child's shoes is important for maintaining comfort and an attractive appearance. Polish protects leather shoes from dirt and dampness. It also helps keep natural oils in the leather to maintain softness and flexibility. An important part of proper care is teaching the child to wear the correct shoe for the occasion.



Children should wear rubber boots when going out in wet weather to protect their shoes and feet. A leather shoe that has been thoroughly wet will have a shortened life and may be stiff to wear.

If shoes do get wet, stuff the toes with paper and allow them to dry away from direct heat. Remember that a damp shoe worn for even a short period of time is an ideal breeding place for fungi that cause athlete's foot.

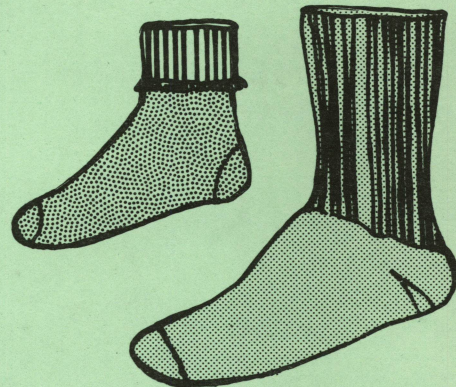
Shoes should have a rest between wearings. If possible, the same pair of shoes should not be worn 2 days in succession to allow time for any perspiration inside the shoe to evaporate. Practically speaking, however, your child may need to wear the same pair of shoes day after day. If so, be sure to place them in a dry place with good air circulation overnight or between wearings.

Have soles repaired before they are worn through. When complete soles need replacing, comfort and fit should be questioned. Resoling may change the shape and size of the shoe and, in most instances, will cut **one size** in width. Reheel shoes when edges wear down noticeably.

### Proper Socks

Socks are worn for warmth, to absorb perspiration and to help prevent friction or rubbing by the shoes. Socks that are too small should not be worn. Generally, socks that are "walked down" into the shoes are too small. If socks are too large, they also may be harmful to a child's foot, especially if the socks are tucked under the toes and make uncomfortable lumps.

Some experts suggest that, after the first washing, socks or stockings should be one-half inch longer than the longest toe. Check labels for shrinkage resistance before you buy. Stretch socks should not be purchased for little children because their growing feet need loose fitting, nonconstricting socks to move around in.



Cotton, cotton blend and wool socks are most comfortable because they readily absorb perspiration. Synthetic fibers are strong, but they lack good absorbency and do not allow moisture to evaporate. For durability, you may prefer socks that are reinforced with nylon in the heel and toe. Comfortable socks or stockings are an important accessory item for healthy, "happy" feet.

### Caution

The information in this publication is intended only to help prevent foot problems in normal, healthy feet. If problems arise, they should receive the attention of a physician who may refer you to the appropriate specialist.