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Being overweight makes kids' feet hurt. . . and when their feet hurt they're less active.

It's a "vicious cycle" says Dr. Tom Vail of Findlay's Advanced Foot Care.

"We're seeing more and more obese children with foot and ankle problems," adds Dr. Vail. "You want overweight children to exercise and lose weight, but because of their weight their feet hurt and they can't exercise."

An estimated sixteen percent of U.S. children ages six to nineteen are overweight. Last year, researchers in Britain reported alarming new evidence that childhood obesity actually changes the foot structure and results in instability when walking. Being overweight flattens the foot, straining the plantar fascia, causing heel pain. Those extra childhood pounds can also exacerbate congenital foot conditions like bunions and hammertoes.

Dr. Vail says that he can help reduce foot pain in overweight children with orthotics, physical therapy and other conservative measures; however, he emphasizes that parents need to take responsibility for overseeing their child's lifestyle and diet.

"We can treat the symptoms, but parents need to help their child address the cause of their pain and the real reason

for inactivity."