



HEALTH & FITNESS • 9

## Weekend Doctor

By Dr. THOMAS F. VAIL

With back to school season underway, all parents should take a few minutes to inspect their children's feet for problems that could sideline their son or daughter from sports or other fall activities.

Parents can spot several potential foot problems by observing how their kids walk.

Parents can ask these questions:

- Does my pre-schooler walk on his or her toes?
- Does my child walk irregularly?
- Is one of my child's legs longer than the other?
- Do my child's feet turn in or out excessively?
- Does my child often trip or stumble?
- Do the bottom of my child's shoes show uneven wear patterns?
- Does my child complain of tired legs, night pains or cramping?



Vail

These simple questions can uncover common problems like ingrown toenails or more serious problems.

Some younger children toe-walk because of tightness in their Achilles tendon. This can happen when toddlers spend too much time in walkers. A foot and ankle surgeon can recommend stretching exercises that can be fun for small children and help prevent lower back pain as they get older.

If one of your child's legs is longer than the other, heel lifts may be required to restore proper balance. Early intervention could prevent scoliosis (a curvature of the spine) later in life.

In addition, look at your child's shoes. For example, if a shoe is worn on the big toe side, it could be a sign of poor arch support or flat feet.

Leg and foot pain can indicate flat feet or other disorders that are easier to treat the earlier they are diagnosed. Remember: children with flat feet are at risk for arthritis later in life if the problem is left untreated.

Don't be fooled; growing pains are a myth! If your kids complain about tired legs, heel pain or cramping in their legs or feet at night, consider that a warning sign and see a doctor.

In the fall, I also see many college-age students complaining about pain from walking so much every day. Heel pain and shin splints can plague freshman not used to walking long distances across campus to attend classes.

For most students, daily stretching and proper walking shoes can easily solve this problem. If there are foot deformities like hammertoes, surgery may be advised to make walking more comfortable.

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