

'Taking Care of Your Feet Is Not Child's Play'

With the evidence of the school year and summer beginning it's time for kids to escape the clutches of the television and embrace the playground. Whether it's participating in a game of tag, playing a sport or having fun in the sandbox, plenty of children will be active on their feet this summer.

However, a day in the sun can end with a day at the doctor's office if the proper safety measures are ignored. Before children catch a glimpse of the giant slide at the pool, the oversized toys at the park or the exciting rides at the amusement park, prepare them with the right footwear and protect them with the right care.

These tips from the American Podiatric Medical Association (APMA) could save your child's soles this summer and a trip to the Emergency Room.

- Carefully observe your child's walking patterns. Does your child have toes that point in or out, have knock-knees or other gait abnormalities? These problems can be corrected if they are detected early and treated by a podiatrist.
- Children's feet change size rapidly so always have your child's feet measured each time you purchase new shoes.
- When shopping for shoes, look for stiff material on either side of the heel, adequate cushioning and a built-in arch. The shoe should bend at the ball of the foot, NOT in the middle of the shoe.
- Never wear hand-me-down shoes.
- Limit the time children wear platform or heeled shoes and alternate with good quality sneakers or flat shoes. High-tops generally help prevent ankle sprains.
- Don't buy shoes that need a "break-in" period. Good shoes should feel comfortable right away. For athletic activities, choose a shoe that is designed for the sport your child will be playing.
- Never pack brand new shoes for your children to wear on vacation.
- Walking barefoot on pavement, hotel or airplane carpeting, in hotel bathrooms or a locker room and near the pool can make your child susceptible to a host of infections. Always wear a pair of flip-flops or strap sandals made of soft, supple leather to prevent contracting a bacteria or fungus like athlete's foot or plantar warts.
- When applying sunscreen, don't forget about putting some on your child's feet. The skin on the top of the feet is quite sensitive and susceptible to sunburn. Additionally, always remember to re-apply.
- Lack of complaints by a youngster is not a reliable sign. The bones of growing feet are so flexible that they can be twisted and distorted without the child being aware.
- Be careful about applying home remedies to children's feet. Preparations strong enough to kill certain types of fungus can harm the skin.

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