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The evidence used in the preparation of this leaflet is available on request. Please email: patient.information@salisbury.nhs.uk if you would like a reference list.

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Toe walking - your child's legs are OK! (page 1 of 2)

Walking on tip toes (toe-walking)

Many children walk on their toes when they are young but this usually resolves as they develop. As children grow and become taller walking up on your toes becomes tiring, this is why you don't see many adults walking on their toes. Childhood toe walking will not lead to deformities of your child's feet.

What are the causes?

1) Muscle stiffness

Some children naturally have tight calf muscles (muscles on the back of the lower leg) which means they lift their heels up to make it more comfortable to walk.

2) Flexible joints

Some children naturally have extra stretchy ligaments which means that their joints have extra movement. This is sometimes referred to as ligament laxity, joint hypermobility or 'double jointed'. Ligament laxity is normal and as the child grows the ligaments become tighter and the muscles strengthen, giving the joints more support to make them more stable.

Whilst the joints are extra bendy some children feel quite unsteady on their feet so they start to walk on their toes. They 'lock' their ankle joint to reduce the amount of movement. Toe walking can become a habitual way of stepping and the child may continue to walk on their toes even after the ligaments have tightened up and the muscles have strengthened. As this is a habit children can correct their walking with time.

How you can help

- stretching the ankle joints can help to keep the muscles at a good length. The child should sit on the floor and pull their feet up for 30 seconds. Try to encourage your child to do this twice a day. Improving muscle flexibility can reduce the chance of your child experiencing leg pains.



Children's Physiotherapy
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- for all children well fastened supportive footwear will encourage a good foot posture and walking pattern. The extra support of boots may help the child to feel more supported at their ankles and therefore not go up onto their toes to gain stability. (Fur lined or fabric boots and loosely fastened trainers are not supportive).
- praise your child when they walk with their heels down. Try not to tell your child too frequently to put their heels down as after a while they 'tune out' and stop listening.
- for activities to place your heel down, try walking on your heels or walking along a line on the floor carefully placing your feet down next to each other. Show your child how you place your heel down first.
- children with particularly tight muscles can see the physiotherapist for additional stretches and may be seen by an Orthotist for insoles or night splints.
- children with weak muscles may be given some exercises by the physiotherapist.



If you are concerned about your child's feet your GP or health visitor can refer you to see a children's physiotherapist.