Podiatry and children’s feet

Children and teenagers may experience foot pain that affects their play and general activity. There are a number of common podiatric conditions which present in children:

1. **Flat or pronated feet**
   Over-pronation, characterised by inward rolling of the feet and ankles, either as a result of flat feet or other causes, can sometimes result in ankle, knee, hip or lower back pain. These conditions often resolve with age, however footwear and some form of innersole, wedge or prefabricated orthoses are sometimes recommended to provide support and assist in pain relief.

2. **Calcaneal Apophysitis**
   In children, pain around the heels is usually a sign of Calcaneal Apophysitis. Calcaneal Apophysitis will ultimately resolve as the growth plate around the heel bone fully develops and the growth plate closes by approximately age 15. Early treatment can relieve discomfort and maintain participation in daily activities and sport.

3. **Osgood-Schlatters disease**
   This variant of knee pain is often caused by overuse of the muscles in the thigh in growing adolescents, and poor biomechanics can be a contributing factor. There are a variety of in-shoe supports that may aid pain relief if biomechanics are a contributing factor.

4. **Ingrown toenails**
   Ingrown toenails can be present at birth and are common in growing feet, particularly as shoes become too tight. Clinical treatment is recommended to avoid infection, and minor surgery may be required for more serious cases.

5. **Viruses and fungal infections**
   Warts and Athlete’s foot are the most common virus and fungal infections affecting children. The viral and fungal pathogens often thrive in dark and moist environments i.e. swimming pools. There are many simple, in-clinic treatments that can assist with eliminating these infections.

6. **In-toeing, out-toeing, bowed legs and knocked knees**
   These are seen to varying degrees in children under the age of eight years. If the gait concern is causing pain or not reducing in severity with time, further examination should be considered.

This resource has been provided by an Australian Podiatry Association (APodA) member podiatrist as part of Foot Health Month 2014
Children are naturally active beings. Their young bodies are full of energy to jump, hop, skip and run around all day long. If your child is having trouble keeping up with the other kids, or is regularly falling over for no apparent reason, they might be having foot problems.

Problems with your child’s feet can impact them in their daily life. Foot conditions can be associated with knee, hip and back pain and may impact a child’s motor skill development and posture. Bones and joints in children are constantly growing and aren’t fully developed until adulthood. Incorrect movement patterns and untreated foot conditions can impact the development of young, supple bones and joints.

Here are 10 tips for healthy feet in kids:

1. Babies’ feet develop and grow rapidly. Allowing babies to remain barefoot while crawling enables full contact between their skin and the ground, which assists the development of balance and proprioception, or the understanding of where their bodies are. Of course, make sure there are no hazards around that could injure bare feet.

2. When your child starts to walk, it’s a good idea to get professionally fitted shoes to ensure a good fit and to protect their feet from the environment.

3. Try to get shoes that fit both the length and width of your child’s feet, and that are made of breathable canvas or leather.

4. Sock sizes often change as frequently as shoe sizes. Make sure socks aren’t too tight and that they don’t bunch up inside shoes, as they can then rub and may cause blisters.

5. Little feet become big feet quickly, and your child can wind up wearing tight-fitting shoes before you’ve had a chance to even think about buying new ones! Measure your child’s feet regularly to be sure they are wearing shoes that fit properly. Shoes that are too tight may cause pain and discomfort.

6. The way your child’s shoes show wear and tear can give you a good indication of incorrect walking patterns or postural problems. Excessive wear and tear, for example, from the outside edge to the inside of the shoe or around the heel is indicative of problems that should be checked out.

7. Wash little feet daily in soap and water and dry thoroughly. Little feet often get sweaty, and little cotton threads or even long hair from mum can wrap around little toes inside socks.

8. Keep toenails trimmed and take care not to cut nails too close to the skin as this can lead to ingrown toenails that can become painful or infected.

9. Children rarely complain about painful or injured feet, so when they do it is a good indicator to get them checked out.
Sometimes they need help to take the right first step. You can trust APodA member podiatrists with your kids’ feet.

October is Foot Health Month.