When children **are walking on their tiptoes**

A study of paediatric orthopaedist Dr. Udo Herberger confirms great success in the therapy of children as habitual toe walkers

Around 10% of all children older than three are affected, and their helpless parents are often driven to despair. Toe walking out of habit is an anomaly of the gait pattern, which is also called idiopathic toe walking among experts. The reasons for it are still unknown. The children concerned only walk on their forefoot and do not show any normal flexing action. Usually this symptom can only be seen while going barefoot.

All parts of our body interact with each other. Our muscles, tendons and joints have to play together like an orchestra in order to make a normal movement pattern possible. An unnatural gait pattern like toe walking can therefore entail serious consequences. Poor posture of the whole body - in particular of the legs, pelvis, back as well as of the trunk and shoulders - is only one example. Putting weight on the foot while walking is necessary for a stable posture, especially during the period of growth.

Dr. Udo Herberger, specialist for paediatric orthopaedics in Osnabrück/Germany, knows the concerns of the parents very well. «I meet many parents desperately looking for help. Unfortunately they still believe that toe walking will disappear in time. But when a six-year old child is already complaining about pain in the knees or back, it is about time to act.» Dr. Herberger treated several affected children in an overarching study by providing sensomotoric orthotics. The results were a tremendous success. Over 120 children showed a greatly improved gait pattern after the therapy. Sensomotoric orthotics follow the approach to directly influence the motor skills. But it is important not to force the feet into an apparently right form. «The orchestra of muscles, tendons and joints has to be retuned. Sensomotoric orthotics only set the note, the rest is done by the body itself.» says Dr. Herberger. A good posture begins in the foot. Children deserve the opportunity to have a strong basis to grow on.

Parents and their questions for Dr. Udo Herberger

Our six-year old son is a toe walker. We have been consulting so many doctors yet. They all sent us back home and said that it will disappear in time. Shall we believe that?

Clear answer: No, certainly not. The complications in the form of poor posture could be too damaging. Even if your child stops toe walking, the body has already learned a false posture. It would take strength and a therapy to help the body to find its balance again. footpower is the right answer for you and your son. You will find more information about footpower in Australia on www.footpower.com.au

Dr. Udo Herberger has been running his own doctor's office in Osnabrück/Germany since 1997. His focus lies on special palliative care of the spinal column, interventional radiology, osteopathy, atlas therapy, paediatric therapy as well as sensomotoric functional disorders of children.

Specialist for orthopaedics / paediatric orthopaedics
Specialist for orthopaedics and casualty surgery, special palliative care, manual medicine, atlas therapy, chirotherapy, sports medicine, acupuncture, and osteopathy (DAAO-USA)

Can a therapy with sensomotoric orthotics also have negative consequences for the development of children's feet?

Unfortunately we often see cushions where the truss pads, which are the most important component of the orthotic, are arranged in an unnatural order. Consequently certain areas of the foot can be stimulated, which might have a negative influence on the sensomotoric system. Thus it is important that experienced doctors and orthopaedists specialised in sensomotorics oversee the therapy and provision of sensomotoric orthotics.

There are much less expensive orthotics. Would not they be enough?

Cheap orthotics usually are standardised and machine-made. They force the foot of the child in the wanted posture, but do not give the body the opportunity to activate the muscles by its own efforts. But this is the precondition for improving a poor posture in the long run. The aim of a therapy with orthotics is that children one time will be able to walk on healthy feet without needing orthotics anymore.

At which age shall the therapy begin?

Studies show that the growth period of a child's foot is most active between the age of four and six. Thus the muscles of the foot can be influenced actively by the means of perfectly fitting sensomotoric orthotics. In particular when it comes to children who are toe walkers it is worth mentioning - the earlier the therapy begins the sooner and better will be the treatment itself.

Is it possible that my children use the same orthotics?

Unfortunately this is not possible. Sensomotoric orthotics by footpower are custom made and adjusted to each patient. Each foot is different and the truss pad has to be built by examining the child's foot thoroughly. Usual checkups are essential, as our feet change all the time. Thus the orthotics can be adjusted and the success of the therapy improved.

footpower Sydney
ShoeTech Pty. Ltd. Trading as footpower Pedorthic Clinic,
Suite G5, 25 Ryde Rd, Pymble NSW 2073
reception@footpower.com.au
Ph.: (02) 9972 4488

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