

TOE WALKING

Toe walking can occur in children of any age but it is commonly noted when the child first learns to walk. Toe walking occurs when the child bears weight on the forefoot, with each step. However, some children may be still able to touch the ground with their heel when standing or walking.

Causes of toe walking:

Habitual / Idiopathic: Some children, for no apparent reason, choose to start walking on their toes rather than develop the 'heel to toe walk.' This is called Idiopathic toe walking. (ITW) or Habitual toe walking. It is unclear why this develops, but could be associated with the child wanting to be taller to enable them to reach objects or to be higher than siblings.

Also going up on your tiptoes helps to raise the centre of gravity. This makes the body unsteady with the tendency to fall forward if the head is also tilted forward. This unsteadiness helps to generate forward movement and may help the child initiate their walk or run. There is no treatment for this other than encouraging the child to put their heel to the ground. With time and an increase in body weight the heel may eventually be forced to the ground.

Tight Muscles: Tightness occurs when tendons and muscles are very tight. If the calf muscles and hamstring are very tight this can cause toe walking. In some children tightness causes restricted movement of the ankle and knee joints. So much so, the toes and feet point down and away from the ankle - hence the child walks on the forefoot. This affects other aspects of the walk (gait). For example, the child may walk with a shorter stride length, or a bouncy step - with the heel lifting off the ground prematurely. Tightness may be congenital (present from birth) or developmental. The latter occurs because the bones during growth spurts grow quicker than muscles and tendons. The muscles and tendons are unable to stretch quickly enough and the tightness causes restricted movement at the knee and ankle. Stretching exercises and splints may help to address some of the imbalance.

Neurological: Toe walking may be evident with cerebral palsy or Hypertonia. This may be due to the nervous system causing contraction of the calf muscles, tipping the foot down.

