



The Association of Paediatric Chartered Physiotherapists

APCP Information – Flat Feet

What are Flat Feet?

Flat feet are a common condition where the arch of the foot appears to be absent or reduced when standing.

In children, the arch may appear when they sit down, bend their big toe backward or stand on their tiptoes. This indicates a 'flexible' flat foot.



Most adults develop an arch along the inside edge of their foot, but some may not.

Different terms, like pes planus, pes valgus, pronated feet, and fallen arches, are used to describe flat feet, but they all refer to the same condition.

It's normal for children to have flat feet until around the age of 3. The foot arch typically develops after this age. Between the ages of 1 and 6 years, many children have flat feet as part of normal foot development. Flat feet in older children usually do not cause problems or indicate future walking issues. Around 95% of children outgrow flat feet and develop a normal arch, while the remaining 5% may continue to have flat feet.

What causes flat feet?

The foot has several bones that are connected by flexible bands called ligaments. Flat feet are typically caused by loose ligaments and baby fat between the foot bones. This leads to a collapsed arch when standing (sometimes referred to as "fallen arches").



In some cases, flat feet can be rigid or stiff, requiring specialist assessment.

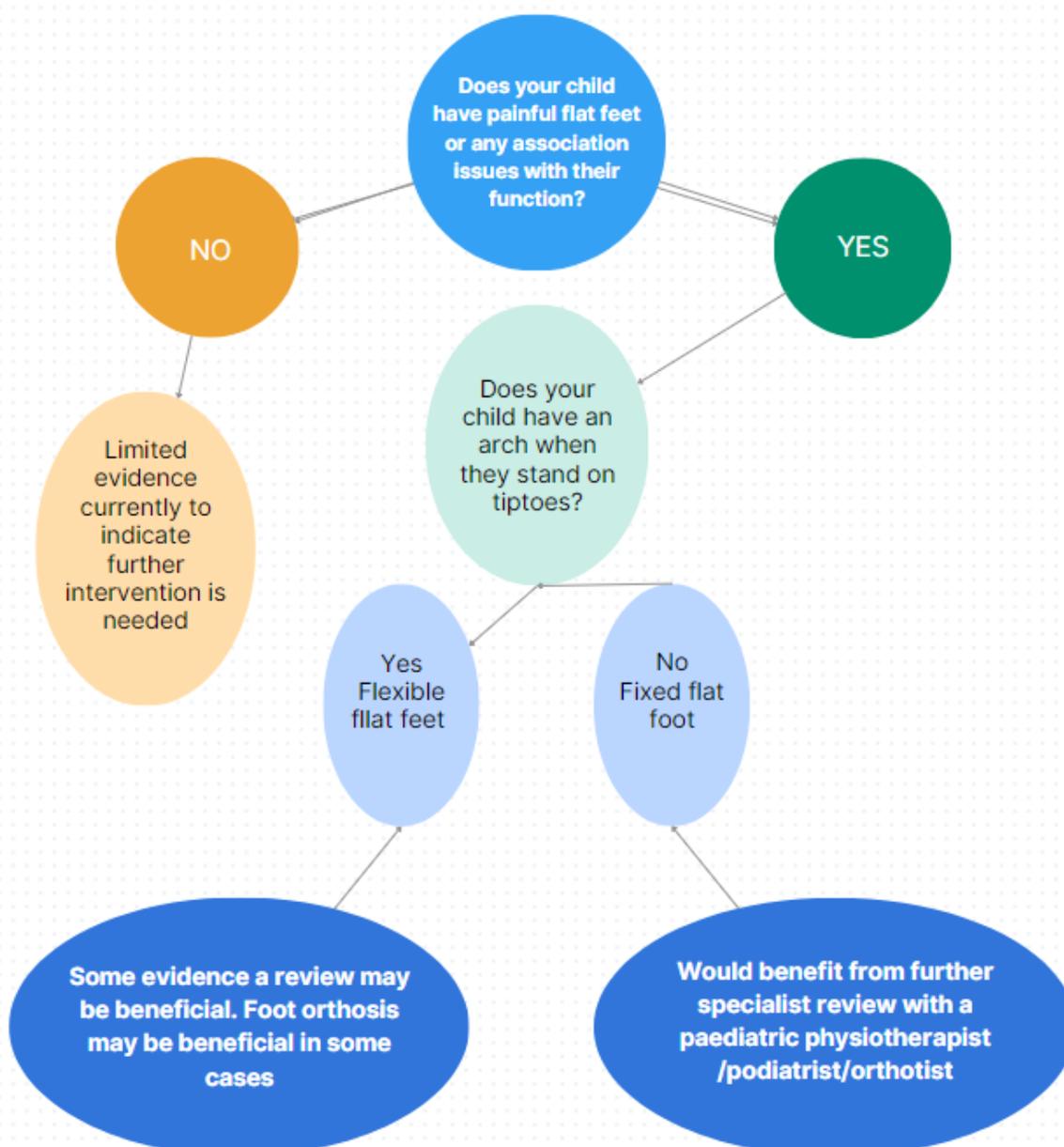
Will my child need treatment?

While some believe that flat feet are abnormal and require treatment with special shoes or insoles, this is not always the case. If your child does not experience issues related to their flat feet, treatment may not be necessary.

Children with painless flexible flat feet can usually engage in physical activities and sports without any problems. It is more important for the foot to function properly rather than appear a certain way.

However, if your child reports foot, ankle, or knee pain, poor balance, or difficulty walking long distances, consulting a physiotherapist may be beneficial. They can then assess the problem and treat as needed.

The diagram below illustrates the treatment pathway based on best available evidence.



What treatment is available?

Wearing proper footwear can improve foot health. For more information, refer to the APCP "Choosing Footwear for Children" leaflet.

Physical activity is essential for children's development. It is recommended to wear supportive footwear when your child is active.

If your child experiences pain during activity, consult with a physiotherapist for advice on modifying their activities.

Physiotherapists or podiatrists may recommend specific exercises for your condition.

Insoles are shoe inserts that provide support. Occasionally they may be recommended by podiatrists, orthotists, or physiotherapists. Insoles can help improve foot positioning and reduce symptoms, but they won't change the foot's shape permanently.

What can I do to help?

Flat feet are often seen in children. It is important to encourage your child to stay active without any specific restrictions. According to the World Health Organization (WHO):

- Children under 5 should engage in a variety of physical activities for a total of 180 minutes throughout the day.
- Children and adolescents aged 5-17 should aim for an average of 60 minutes of moderate-to-vigorous aerobic activity per day, spread across the week.

This leaflet has been produced by the APCP MSK committee after a review of literature and where there is a lack of evidence, a consensus of expert opinion is agreed, correct at time of publication. For information about references and evidence searched, please visit our website. APCP <https://apcp.csp.org.uk> V3 published March 2024 V3 review March 2029

The Association of Paediatric Chartered Physiotherapists (APCP) is one of the CSP's largest Professional Networks and continues to thrive with a membership of over 2,900 paediatric members. We encourage our members and support staff to work together to enhance the quality of life, wellbeing and independence of babies', children, and young people that we deliver care to.



The Chartered Society of Physiotherapy (CSP) is the professional, educational and trade union body for the UK's 64,000 chartered physiotherapists, physiotherapy students and support workers.



The Association of
Paediatric
Chartered Physiotherapists