



Why Shoe Fittings Are Important

No two feet are the same – not even two feet on the same body. Our feet are a continual work-in progress. When we are born, our feet are only partially developed with only 22 recognizable bones. By the time we reach school, this number more than doubles to 45 individual bones – that's a lot of changing in one little foot! These bones will continue to change over the next 15 years, some fusing together and others growing longer, until the age of about 18 when the bones reach a final count of 26. Accommodating little feet as they grow will ensure that they develop properly, that the muscles and tendons that support them develop well, and that no chronic problems will carry into adulthood. The most common cause of foot problems in children are shoes that are too small. More than just discomfort, too-small shoes can give a child a lifetime of problems with their feet, legs, and back.

The Impact of a Too-Small Shoe

- Shoes that are too short or too tight will distort the position of the toes and cause pain, ingrown toenails, hammer toes, calluses and bunions.
- Continually wearing shoes that are too small can distort the growth of bones in the foot resulting in permanent shortening of the bones and chronic pain.
- Cramped toes will also distort the walking pattern resulting in poor posture which can impact muscle development in the foot, leg, hip and back.
- Children may have an increased potential for injury from awkward movements to avoid pain and discomfort.

Most experts will recommend that a child's foot get fitted by a trained shoe fitter at least every three to four months. A toddler's foot can grow as much as a half-size in just two months, school-aged children can gain a half-size every four months. Children should be provided with shoes specifically manufactured with the changing shape of a child's foot in mind.

The Ideal Shoe

The perfect shoe for your child's foot is the one that was specifically selected to fit that foot. They should be fitted for length as well as width and shape, and toes should have plenty of room to wiggle around. A properly fitted shoe will be comfortable from the start and not require a period of “breaking in”.

- **Pre-Walkers.** Children do not need to wear shoes if they are not walking. Their feet only need to be kept warm, and any shoes should be completely flexible and shaped like the child's foot.
- **Toddlers.** Choose high-topped shoes with a tie closure to better fit round feet. Soles should be smooth to avoid tripping, and shoes should be light weight so they don't slow busy feet down. This helps with balance, stability, and gives the child confidence in their new found skill.
- **Preschool and Beyond.** During these years, breathability and fit are the top priority. Children's feet sweat a lot, and their shoes should accommodate this. Shoes should be flexible and not restrict foot movement, and be appropriate for the weather and activity.