

**Clinical Guideline:** Flat Feet Site: FPH

Most children under age three have flat feet  
Ask if the child has pain in their feet

History

General Information

In infants, the fat pad hides the developing arch. Young children have flat feet because they are loose jointed.

Flat feet are normally flexible so the arch returns when on tip toes or non-weight bearing. Most children develop an arch by 6 years. 1 in 5 never do. Most adults with flat feet have no problems or pain.

Flexible flat feet do not require treatment. Arch supports and exercises will not make an arch develop.

Reassure parents. Most children develop an arch by age six  
The vast majority of patients with flexible flatfoot do not require orthopaedic referral  
Painless flexible flat feet require no treatment

Orthotics do not help form an arch and are not recommended

Advice and Treatment

Rigid flatfoot (arch does not reform on tip toe test or in non-weight-bearing)  
Painful flatfoot  
Asymmetry (only one foot)  
Localised tenderness  
Difficulty in functional activities e.g. running, jumping

Referral Guidelines – red flag signs

For rigid flatfoot only: weight-bearing X-ray (AP, lateral and oblique)

Investigation

Ask the child to stand on tip toes. If the arch corrects, the foot is flexible (requires no treatment)  
Alternatively, if an arch can be seen in a non-weight-bearing position (e.g. sitting), the foot is flexible (requires no treatment)

Examination