

Flat Feet

The "arch of the foot" is the name given to a number of bones located on the sole of the foot. They help with shock absorption and adaptation to uneven terrain. Children do not develop arches until much later in their development. However, some individuals will not develop the arches in their feet at all – this is a condition known as flat feet. In most cases, flat feet are an inherited trait, but can also be a result of:

- Conditions that affect muscle and bones (e.g. cerebral palsy).
- Loose connective tissue in the body (e.g. hypermobility).
- Conditions whereby connective tissues in the foot are stretched and inflamed – possibly as a result of overuse, poor footwear, injury, age, obesity or arthritis.

Flat feet do not usually cause any problems and therefore does not require treatment. However, in some cases, flat feet can cause:

- Pain in the feet, ankles, lower legs, knees, hips or lower back.
- An underlying problem with the bones, muscles or connective tissues in and around the feet

In such cases, investigation and treatment are recommended to diagnose and treat the cause of the discomfort.

How is it treated?

Helping patients with flat feet begins with holistic clinical assessments and understanding the medical and developmental history of the condition.

Podiatrists are the primary healthcare professionals involved in assessment and treatment of flat feet, but multiple medical and allied health disciplines may be involved, including orthopedic doctors, sports medicine doctors, physiotherapists and occupational therapists.

What does Podiatry treatment involve?

Podiatry consultation involves diagnosing the cause of flat feet with the aim to reduce associated pain and to prevent recurrence. Treatment may include footwear advice, insoles and stretching and strengthening exercises. These treatments will not change the shape of the feet, but will support the feet; reducing the pain caused by the condition. Comprehensive treatment plans will be made after discussion with patients and/or their caregivers, taking into consideration their specific circumstances and preferences.

If conservative management show limited effect, a referral to orthopedic doctors may be made for surgical consideration.