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Baby steps: Shoes for babies and toddlers

November 24, 2009 - 4:30PM



Early shoes should allow for natural movement and development of the feet.

A guide to buying your baby and toddler's first shoes and what the experts recommend.

That time has arrived to buy the first pair of shoes for your baby. Questions like these start coming to mind: what to look for? What is the correct type of shoe? What about the soles on shoes? Do I need to buy expensive designer label shoes which can cost a fortune if they are going to outgrow them so quickly?

That's right, buying shoes can be considered as one of the testing items of clothing to select for purchase if you are unsure yet also the most important as feet are one of the most complex parts of the human body. It is important to give our precious little feet the respect they deserve and the best possible start!



What the experts are saying about babies & shoes...

Pediatricians and podiatrists recommend that children's early shoes allow for natural movement and development of the feet. Medical studies show that they should be as close as possible to walking barefoot, while still allowing for protection from the external environment (such as cold temperature, hard floors, outside surfaces, etc). To achieve this they should be as soft and flexible as possible and also allow the child's feet to breathe.

There is no need for shoes with arch support for children up to 3-years-old. The arches of the feet are still developing at this age and need to develop naturally without additional support - arch support can in fact be harmful at this age and can negatively affect the development of the foot and cause problems through to adulthood. (Unless directed otherwise by a professional).

A guide on what to look for when buying your baby's first shoes:

A very flexible sole

Bend the shoe in your hand, checking it for flexibility. Ideally, you should be able to fold the shoe in half. For outside wear, the sole should be thick enough to protect baby's feet from sharp or rough objects. "Children before the ages of 4 years of age should be in a flexible shoe in order for muscles to develop without restriction of movement," -quoted from professional Podiatrist

Breathable uppers and lining

Select shoes which are preferably leather or canvas (not synthetic). Note that many shoes imported from example China are being stamped as leather when in fact they are synthetic (fake) leather which does not breathe. Often in this case a pig skin lining is used to give the smell and feel of leather, yet the shoes may be stamped with "leather uppers and lining".

How to tell...

Have a look at where the leather is cut and feel the leather with your fingers. The synthetic leather is smoother and has a synthetic (usually black) material backing. Using shoes that do not breathe can cause bacterial problems with your child's feet at an early age.

No high-tops and definitely no heels!

High-top (ankle) shoes or boots can restrict the movement of a baby's ankles, possibly leading to developmental problems. And heels can drastically effect the development of your child's feet. Look for plenty of toe room. Toe room is not only important in making sure that baby's feet have room to grow, but also baby needs to be able to wiggle his/her toes freely. It's best to have about 1 cm of space (or one finger width) in the toe area.

A comfortable interior

Put your fingers inside of the shoe and check for any hard seams or ridges that might irritate your baby's foot.

No arch support

Arch support should not be built into shoes for children under the age of 3 (unless directed otherwise by a professional). The arches, bones, and ligaments of the feet are still developing, and the feet need to grow and develop naturally without being artificially supported. As the child progresses from 3 yrs of age upwards arch support becomes more important.

Expensive priced shoes do not necessarily mean the best

Like with all things, there are some crazy prices when it comes to children's shoes and purchasing the most expensive pair is not always the best choice. You are often paying for a designer name and not the quality of the materials and research involved in the making of the shoes. Therefore, purchase shoes from reputable companies designed specifically for children.

This article has been supplied by [Little Squeaky Shoes](#), an Australian footwear company offering shoes designed especially for babies and toddlers.

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