Flat Feet (Pes Planus)

Understanding symptoms, treatment and recovery

Flat Feet (Pes Planus)

A guide to symptoms, treatment and recovery



What are flat feet?

Flat feet (pes planus) means the arch on the inside of one or both feet is lower than normal or flattened. Flat feet are common and often cause no problems.

Treatment depends on symptoms

Foot shape alone does not determine treatment. If you have no pain, treatment is usually not required. Exercise and supportive footwear may help when symptoms occur.

Understanding flat feet

Causes, symptoms and assessment

What are flat feet?

The inner arch is lower than normal or completely flattened in one or both feet. In flexible flat foot, the arch appears when sitting or on tiptoes but flattens when standing. In rigid flat foot, it is always flat. Flat feet are common and often cause no problems. In children, they usually improve with growth.

What causes flat feet?

- Natural foot shape, often inherited; loose ligaments
- Weakness or tightness of foot and ankle muscles
- Tendon problems, especially the posterior tibial tendon
- Foot or ankle injury; arthritis or inflammatory conditions
- Excess weight increasing load on the feet
- Pregnancy may temporarily flatten the arch

Common symptoms

Many people have no symptoms. Others notice arch or heel pain, ankle pain or instability, tired or aching feet after walking or standing, pain with prolonged activity, uneven shoe wear, or knee, hip or lower back discomfort due to an altered walking pattern.

How are flat feet diagnosed?

Assessment includes symptoms and activity levels, observation while standing and walking, and checks of movement, strength and flexibility. X-ray, ultrasound or MRI may be used for severe or persistent pain.

Treatment depends on symptoms

Flat feet are common and often cause no problems. If you have no pain, treatment is not required. Stay active and wear supportive footwear.

Important information

Seek advice for worsening pain, difficulty walking, swelling, redness or sudden loss of foot shape, or when symptoms affect your daily activities.

Exercises and rehabilitation

Illustrated examples for foot strength and flexibility

Exercise examples

Ask your physiotherapist which exercises are suitable for you. Use controlled movements and work within comfort.



Arch control and flexibility

Short foot: Sit with your foot on the ground. Gently lift your arch while keeping your toes relaxed.
Calf stretch: Face a wall with your hands supported. Keep your back leg straight and the heel on the ground.

Strength and balance

Ball heel raises: Hold a sturdy chair. Place a small soft ball between your heels. Gently squeeze the ball, rise onto your toes, then lower slowly with control.
Balance: Stand on one leg beside a sturdy chair, using support as needed.
Follow the repetitions and frequency prescribed by your physiotherapist.

Treatment and next steps

Treatment depends on symptoms rather than foot shape alone

Treatment options

No pain: no treatment is required; stay active and wear supportive footwear.
Physiotherapy: foot and ankle strengthening, calf and Achilles stretching, improved walking mechanics and balance, and activity advice.
Footwear: supportive shoes with good arch support and a firm heel counter; avoid worn-out or unsupportive shoes such as flip-flops.
Insoles: off-the-shelf or custom-made orthotics may reduce pain and improve comfort.
Pain relief: simple painkillers if appropriate; ice packs after activity for discomfort.

When should I seek further help?

- Pain worsens or does not improve
- Walking becomes difficult
- Swelling, redness or sudden loss of foot shape
- Symptoms affect work or daily activities

Outlook

Most people manage well with exercise, footwear advice and activity modification. Surgery is rarely needed and only considered when conservative treatment has failed.

Self-care and further advice

Stay active within comfort, maintain a healthy weight, increase activity gradually, replace shoes regularly and perform prescribed exercises consistently. For concerns or ongoing pain, speak to your physiotherapist or GP.

Everyday reminder

Stay active within comfortable limits, increase activity gradually, replace shoes regularly and keep up your prescribed exercises.

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