

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW: INTOEING

What is intoeing?

Intoeing (also called “pigeon-toed”) is when feet turn inward instead of pointing straight ahead. You might notice it when your child walks but it’s easier to see when they are running. Parents usually notice intoeing when their baby begins to walk, but children can develop intoeing at any age.

When a child has intoeing, they might trip or fall when they walk or run but it doesn’t cause any pain or long term problems. In most children under eight years old, intoeing will correct itself without the help of casts, braces, surgery or special treatment.

What causes intoeing?

Three main conditions can cause the toes to turn inward:

1. A twist in the thigh bone (femoral anteversion)

Intoeing can happen when a child’s thigh bone (femur) turns inward. This causes the knees and feet to point inward when walking or running. Children with femoral anteversion like to sit in a “W” position, with their knees bent and their feet out to the sides behind them.

Many children have this condition and it is most obvious between the ages of five or six. Femoral anteversion corrects itself in almost all children as they grow and their bones mature, usually by about ten years of age.



“W” sit position

Through research, we’ve learned that special shoes, braces, and exercises do not help. Surgery is only an option when there is a severe deformity that causes problems tripping or walking in a child over nine or ten years old. This surgery involves cutting the femur bone and rotating it to the proper alignment, which is quite invasive, and carries some risks.

2. An inward twist of a bone in the lower leg (tibial torsion)

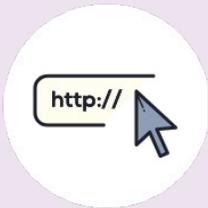
Tibial torsion happens often in babies and young children. When some children start walking, their foot turns inward because the tibia is curved inward as well. The tibia will straighten and untwist as the child grows. Tibial torsion almost always improves without the need for special splints, braces, or shoes. These treatments do not help the natural growth of the tibia and do not correct the intoeing.

Severe twists in the tibia can be corrected with surgery. This is rarely needed, but can help if the intoeing gets in the way of everyday activities after children have reached 8-10 years of age.

3. A curve in the bones of the foot (metatarsus adductus)

In metatarsus adductus, the child's feet bend inward from the middle of the foot to the toes. It can be mild and flexible or more severe. This is caused by the position of the baby in the uterus before birth.

In most cases, metatarsus adductus improves by itself over the first 4-6 months of life. Some babies will need casts or special shoes if the foot curve doesn't get better by around 6-9 months of age. Surgery is rarely needed for this condition.



Need more information?

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