

West Ham Lane Health Centre
84 West Ham Lane
Stratford
E15 4PT
Tel: 0208 586 6380



Tip-toeing

For Compliments, Comments and Complaints,
please contact the Patient Advice and Liaison
Service (PALS):

FREEPHONE 0800 783 4839

Email: elft.palsandcomplaints@nhs.net

Most children who walk on their toes are idiopathic toe walkers, also known as habitual toe walkers. This is when a child walks on his or her toes without putting much weight on their heels. In some children it simply becomes a habit, but when prompted they are able to put their heels down to the ground. When they are not concentrating, they usually revert to walking on their toes.

Toe walking in toddlers is quite common between 10 and 18 months when children are learning to walk. Children generally adopt a normal walking pattern as they get older.

Idiopathic toe walking in children is not a serious condition. It often resolves spontaneously and does not cause the child significant problems later in life.

What are the symptoms of toe walking?

Walking on tiptoes is the main symptom of toe walking. Occasionally a child may also:

- suffer with pain or discomfort in lower limbs
- be more wobbly on their feet
- have a tendency to walk fast or run
- fall over more frequently

What causes it?

The cause for tip toe walking is often unknown and this is called idiopathic.

There may be a slight shortening of the Achilles tendon, which links the lower leg muscles to the back of the heel bone. If it is too short, it can prevent the heel from touching the ground.

There is also often a sensory element to toe walking. Children may walk on their toes to avoid full foot contact on floor or to increase their body awareness to make themselves feel more secure or alert.

What can I do to help?

- **Activities to help stretch the calf muscles**
- Lots of games that encourage squatting with your child's heels down

- Penguin walking on their heels (with toes up in the air), walking up slopes with knees straight and heels down

- **Encourage** and remind your child to keep their heels down.

- **Stretches:** Your Physiotherapist will advise which stretches to complete or if any stretches are required.

Calf stretches



Hamstring stretches



Pictures used from www.physiotherapyexercises.com

Intensive programme: Aim to do 3 times a day. HOLD stretches for 20 seconds and REPEAT 3 times.

Maintenance programme: Once a day BUT keep an eye on the range. If it looks tighter follow the INTENSE PROGRAMME for a few weeks.

- **Supportive footwear**

High ankle shoes/boots fastened tightly will hold a child's foot in the shoe and provide some sensory feedback to help them walk with their heels down. All children's shoes should be fitted to correct length and width in the shoe shop.

- **Other treatments that may be considered:**

Serial casting – Using plaster casts to provide a prolonged stretch to the muscles if they have become very tight. Your Physiotherapist will refer your child for this if necessary.

Onward referrals – Toe walking can be linked to Sensory Processing and Social Communication Disorders. Your Physiotherapist may consider referrals to Occupational Therapy, Speech and Language Therapy and/or a Paediatrician to address these concerns.