

# Resolving Toe Walking in Children and Adults

Toe walking occurs when a person walks on the balls of their feet, or 'tip toes,' rather than on their whole foot. When the cause of this abnormal gait is unknown, we refer to it as idiopathic toe walking. This condition is relatively common in small children and will normally resolve itself by the time a child reaches school age. However, in some cases it will not.

If your child's toe walking does not resolve automatically, it can cause problems later on in life, such as painful biomechanical issues and shortened muscles. In order to prevent these larger issues from happening, it's best to professionally address toe walking if it's still occurring after three years of age.

Toe walking is sometimes caused by muscle tightness (particularly in the calf), joint stiffness, problems in gait development, growth spurts, and neurological conditions. It will often lead to pain in the feet and knees and tightness in the legs while walking and sitting. The same goes for adults who experience this condition. Muscle tightness in the calf is the most common symptom of toe walking.

There are a number of exercises that have proven to effectively combat toe walking in both children and adults. Your PhysioFirst physiotherapist or kinesiologist can work with you to build a tailored regimen that will help you or your child successfully overcome a case of toe walking.

## Toe Walking in Adults

In some cases, an adult will carry the toe-toe gait through to adulthood. This typically occurs if corrective measures were not present or were ineffective in childhood. In other cases, toe walking presents in response to various foot conditions, such as calluses, corns, or a loss of sensation in the feet.

The impact of toe walking in the long-term is the same. You will find your calf and other muscles tightening and walking with a flat foot may become difficult, resulting in cramping. This is particularly true when the condition persists for an extended period of time.

If you toe walk most of the time, you may have problems wearing shoes comfortably or engaging in recreational activities that require special footwear, such as roller skates. You may also find you fall more easily.

The good news is that you can work to restore your normal gait by stretching and strengthening the afflicted areas daily. Ask your PhysioFirst physiotherapist or kinesiologist which stretches and strengthening techniques will be most effective for you.

## Exercises to Combat Toe Walking

There are a variety of exercises that can be performed by both children and adults to reduce the effects of toe walking and help to re-establish a normal gait.

These are four exercises that we recommend trying first. If you choose to work with one of our licenced physiotherapists or kinesiologists, you will be personally assessed and provided with a regimen that works within your specific needs.

### #1 - Leg-Up Singles

Lay on your back against a firm, comfortable surface. Keeping both legs straight, press one leg against the surface and raise the other in the air. Hold this for 15 seconds, then switch.

### #2 - Knee-Up Singles

Lay in the same position, but this time bend your leg and bring it up under your chin until a stretch is felt. Hold for 15 seconds and switch.

### #3 - Wedge Stands

Stand on a wedge with your knees straight and your heels on the edge, stretching your feet upward. Perform an activity for 30 minutes in this position.

### #4 - Penguin Walks

Walk forward with feet turned out and toes lifted slightly (like a penguin) for as long as comfortable or tolerated.

None of these exercises should be painful. If you feel pain while attempting, stop and contact your physiotherapist (or kinesiologist) to ensure they are being performed correctly.

## Physiotherapy for Toe Walking

Physiotherapy for toe walking involves retraining the muscles into a normal gait. When you work with a PhysioFirst physiotherapist, we'll help you retrain your hips and legs to make controlled movements and to shift your weight comfortably and properly as steps are taken. We'll focus on improving your balance, stretching and strengthening your muscles, expanding your range of motion, increasing the size of your steps, and stimulating your nerve pathways. To do this, we break the gait cycle down into manageable chunks and practice repetition.

Before a PhysioFirst physiotherapist dives into building your rehabilitation regimen, we will perform a thorough assessment of your (or your child's) legs and feet. We'll evaluate activities such as walking, running, jumping, and getting on and off of the floor. We'll also look at your range of motion and decide whether or not additional support is needed.

Your physiotherapist may also feel it's appropriate to apply hydrotherapy as part of the rehabilitation process. With hydrotherapy, exercises are performed in warm water, helping to relax the body as you engage with each movement. It also improves circulation as you work through your regimen.

Get started with one of our dedicated physiotherapists today by calling 1-833-U-R-HEARD or book an appointment with our online booking tool [here](#). No matter where you're at, whether you're a parent to a toe walking child or an adult suffering from the affliction, we look forward to helping you overcome the frustrations of toe walking and getting you back on your feet as soon as possible.