

Children's Health Update

Childhood Obesity Linked To Foot Pain

(NAPSA)—Look down to find one possible culprit in America's childhood obesity epidemic: feet.

Doctors with the 6,000-member American College of Foot and Ankle Surgeons (ACFAS) point to a link between foot pain and childhood obesity.

"You want overweight children to exercise and lose weight, but because of their weight, their feet hurt and they can't exercise," says Thanh Dinh, DPM, FACFAS, a foot and ankle surgeon in Boston. "It's a vicious cycle."

An estimated 16 percent of U.S. children ages 6 to 19 are overweight. Foot and ankle surgeons say they're seeing more overweight and obese children with foot and ankle pain in their examining rooms.

"The numbers are definitely increasing. I treat four to five overweight children a week," says Darryl Haycock, DPM, FACFAS, a northwest Ohio foot and ankle surgeon. The average age ranges from 8 to 12 years.

The foot is a complex assembly of 26 bones, 33 joints and more than 100 muscles, tendons and ligaments. Being overweight flattens the foot, straining the plantar fascia, a band of tissue that runs from the heel to the base of the toes, causing heel pain.

Because the heel bone is not fully developed until age 14 or older, overweight children are more prone to Sever's disease. Although not an actual disease, according to FootPhysicians.com, it involves an inflammation of the heel's growth plate due to muscle strain and repetitive stress. Walking makes the pain worse. Being overweight may cause stress fractures, or hairline breaks in a child's heel bone.

But Dr. Haycock notes that some overweight children suffer



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foot pain from congenital or inherited foot conditions, such as bunions, hammertoes, pediatric flatfoot, and tarsal coalition, an abnormal connection between two or more bones in the back of the foot.

Many of Dr. Haycock's young patients complain of calf or arch pain. This can be caused by a flat-foot that is flexible. The collapsing of the arch can require more energy, making it difficult for a child to walk and run.

Foot and ankle surgeons treat many overweight children with custom orthotic devices (shoe inserts), physical therapy and other conservative measures to reduce or eliminate pain.

"As foot and ankle surgeons, we can reduce the aches and pains so children can run around and play like the other kids," says Samuel Nava, DPM, FACFAS, a Dallas-area foot and ankle surgeon. "But parents also need to watch their children's lifestyles and diets."

For more information on children's foot and ankle problems, or to find a foot and ankle surgeon, visit the ACFAS patient information Web site, FootPhysicians.com.