

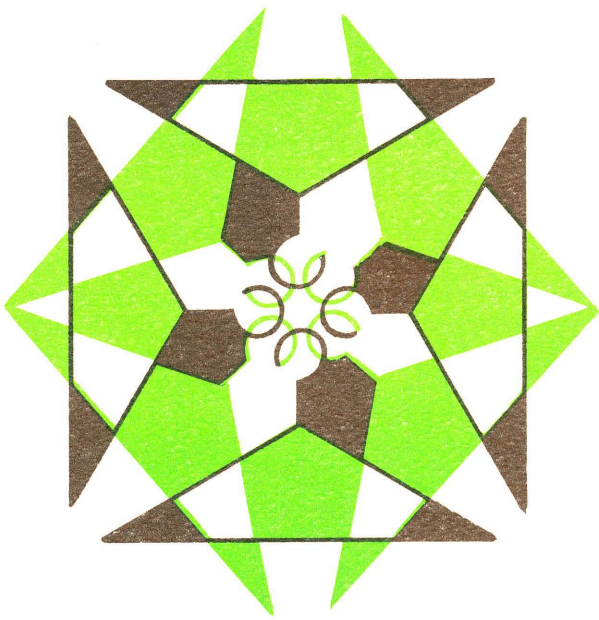
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Buying Shoes for Children  
Michigan State University  
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Bernetta Kahabka, Extension Specialist in Clothing  
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# Buying Shoes for Children

Extension Bulletin E687 – Home & Family Series

EXTENSION CLOTHING PROJECT • MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY

By BERNETTA KAHABKA

“New shoe” time is exciting for children, but a strain on the pocketbook and often frustrating for parents. The newest styles in colors, shapes, and materials naturally appeal to the eye but fashion should team up with FIT for a shoe to protect the foot. Contrary to public opinion, a shoe protects the foot more than it supports the foot.

Buy as good a shoe as you can afford for your children. Materials and construction used will vary with price but you can do some judging, too. Buy on sale, if possible, to get better quality shoes but only if you can get the right fit—not just because the shoes are on sale.

## What Should a Well-Fitted Shoe Do for a Child?

- Protect the foot.
- Hold the foot steady and secure.
- Allow for some room to grow.
- Allow for some wiggle room.
- Allow the foot to breathe.



## THE FIT

When buying children's shoes, don't ask for the size *you think* your child needs. Have both feet measured while the child is standing.

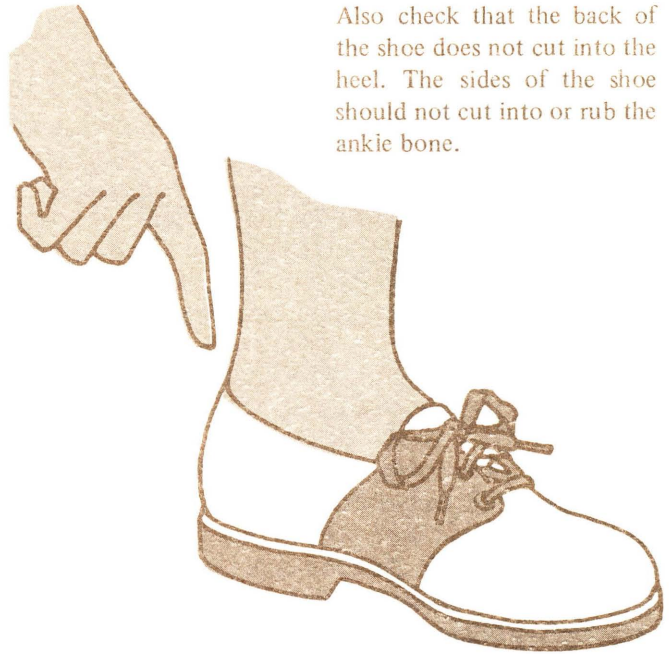
There should be  $\frac{1}{2}$  to  $\frac{3}{4}$  inch space between the end of the longest toe and the tip of the shoe to allow for growth and wiggle room.



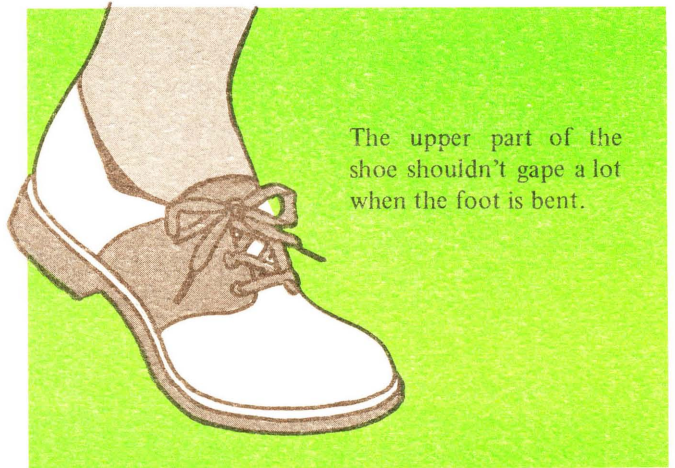
Fitting a shoe is more than a matter of foot length. Feet of the same length may differ in shape and girth (thickness). The widest part of the shoe should match up with the widest part of the foot (across the ball of the foot). You should be able to slightly pinch up the upper part of the shoe across the widest part of the foot when the child is standing.



The heel should fit snugly and firmly so that you can't insert a finger between the heel and the back of the shoe.



Also check that the back of the shoe does not cut into the heel. The sides of the shoe should not cut into or rub the ankle bone.



The upper part of the shoe shouldn't gape a lot when the foot is bent.



If a shoe fits from the heel to the ball of the foot, the arch of the shoe will fit the arch of the foot.

## THE SHOE

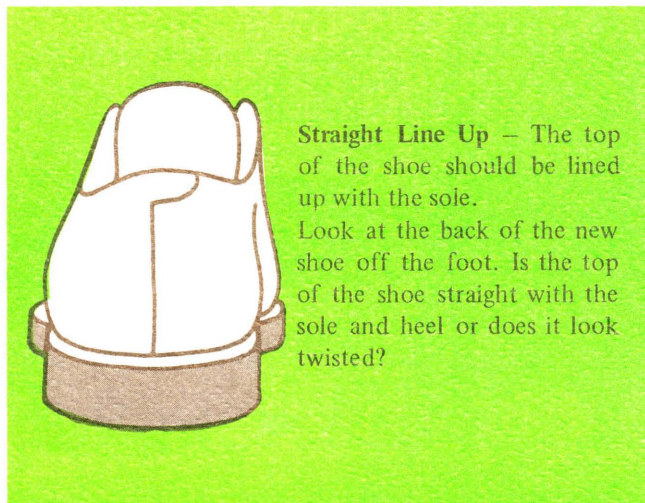
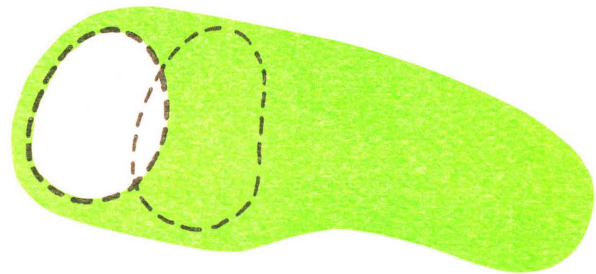
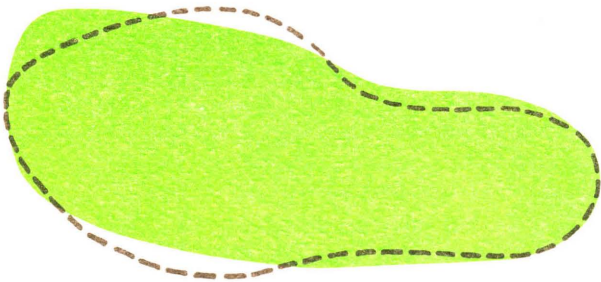
**Heel Counter** – A stiff reinforcement in the heel area holds the heel in place. This helps keep the whole foot firmly in place. This reinforcement is a *counter*.

Look and feel for the extra firmness of a heel counter. Counters are made of leather, man-made materials, or stiffened paper depending on shoe price. Some soft shoes have no heel counters at all.



**Shape** – The shape of a shoe is determined by the last, a wooden form over which the shoe is made.

Most children's feet are straight and should have a shoe with a straight shape or last. Look at the soles of the shoes. Are they straight or do they flare in or out?



**Straight Line Up** – The top of the shoe should be lined up with the sole.

Look at the back of the new shoe off the foot. Is the top of the shoe straight with the sole and heel or does it look twisted?

Are heels and heel counters run over and no longer keeping the heel and foot in place? Can you feel any nails or sharp edges?



Don't let a child wear hand-me-down shoes, even if the shoes *seem* to be big enough for the younger child. Remember, it is *shape* as well as *length* that needs proper fitting.

**Shoe Labeling** – According to law, all shoes must be labeled to show what materials have been used in the various parts of the shoe. Labeling should tell you whether leather or man-made materials were used in the sole, insole, outsole, linings, upper part of the shoes, and heels.

There's no one best material. There are advantages and disadvantages to any shoe material—cost, flexibility, durability, cleanability, comfort, appearance. Labeling tells what materials were used, it does not indicate the quality.

**Inside Story** – Lined or unlined, a shoe should be smooth inside with no wrinkles, ridges, rough surfaces, bulky seams or tack ends coming through. The inside of a shoe should be smooth all the way to the toes.

Normal activity results in foot perspiration. Shoes should allow the foot to breathe and to pass off this moisture rapidly.

Don't accept or buy new shoes which need "breaking in." This is poor fit; the poor feet will have to make the adjustment rather than the shoes.

Don't absolutely follow shoe charts which tell how often a child's shoe size should be changed. It's impossible to predict how often a growing child will need larger shoes. Usually it's sooner than you think.

## OLD SHOES

When deciding whether old shoes are still wearable, ask yourself if the shoe still fits the foot. If a shoe is too short it will show more wear near the toe end.

## SNEAKERS AND SOFT SHOES

Healthy normal feet should be able to wear properly fitted sneakers and soft shoes. The fit of these shoes is just as important as the fit of any shoe.

In addition to checking the fit of sneakers, look for:

1. A thick, resilient sole which is firm but springs back into shape when bent.
2. Reinforced heel counters.
3. Reinforced toe areas (toe bumpers).
4. Cushioned insoles with a built-up arch.
5. Fine, close, double stitching for durability.
6. Ventilation eyelets to allow the foot to breathe.
7. Brands which come in various widths if needed.

Many soft shoes have little depth in the toe area. This causes the shoe to put too much pressure against the toes and the shoe breaks out in the toe area. Sneakers usually have thinner soles and less depth in the toe cap than deck shoes.

There is a tendency to buy soft shoes too small because both the give of the fabric and the open cut styling may make a smaller size seem to fit.

Sneakers should be kept clean, but washed and dried at medium temperatures to prevent shrinkage. It is just as important to keep checking the size of sneakers as any other shoe.

## SOCKS

Have new shoes fitted with the kind of socks your children will ordinarily wear with the shoes. Socks range anywhere from thin and sheer to thick and bulky—from regular to stretch. Different socks take up different amounts of space.

A sock that is too short is no better than a shoe that is too small. All socks and stockings should be at least  $\frac{1}{2}$  inch longer than the foot at the longest toe and should stay that way after washing. Look for shrinkage control if possible. Otherwise, buy socks and stockings to allow for both roominess and shrinkage, even stretch socks. Don't buy stretch socks for little children. The most absorbent sock will be cotton.

Each size in stretch hosiery S-T-R-E-T-C-H-E-S to fit a range of individual foot sizes (for example,  $7\frac{1}{2}$ – $8\frac{1}{2}$ ). If you're buying for a size  $8\frac{1}{2}$  foot it might be wise to buy the next size bracket which begins at 9.

**ACKNOWLEDGMENT:** The contribution of the Southern Michigan Podiatry Association in providing helpful information and review is very much appreciated.

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## BABY SHOES

Parents and grandparents are often eager to have babies take their first steps. However, **let baby decide when.** Then buy baby shoes that:

- protect little feet.
- give a firm base on which to stand.
- give a feeling of security for standing.

Some footwear for babies may be “very cute,” but it's “very critical” to provide the right kind of shoe.

Pre-walkers (babies who can stand but not walk) need a no-heel shoe with a flat, but flexible sole with a little stiffness. Such a shoe will have enough firmness to give them confidence until they are walking on their own. Heavy weight babies will need shoes with a stiffer sole and a well constructed upper area.

Once a child begins to walk, a sturdier shoe is needed. Choose a shoe with a firmer sole and firmer heel counter than that which baby first wore. A shoe with no arch is needed because there is a natural fat pad under the arch of the baby foot. The fat pad is gradually absorbed as the child grows, but it is evident up to three or four years of age.

Baby shoes should be flexible, smooth inside, and large enough to allow tender feet to function without strain or a feeling of insecurity. Rough textured leather soles are less apt to slip. Re-check fit often and change shoes when they no longer fit the baby.

**LITTLE CHILDREN SELDOM WEAR OUT SHOES—THEY OUTGROW THEM.**

## CHILD'S FOOT CARE

98 percent of the newborn babies have normal feet. Help your children to keep their feet normal and healthy!

You might be watchful about your child's teeth, ears, eyes, and skin but do you ever check their feet? Young children are usually too busy to even notice foot discomfort. Blisters, rough spots, hardened or calloused areas, or red and rubbed places may be a signal to check the shoes they are wearing.

Don't wait for your children to complain about the comfort or fit of their shoes. (They may loudly demand new shoes for color and style!) A child's foot bones are quite soft and can actually be squeezed into shoes too small without noticeable pain.

Special foot problems require professional assistance just like any other medical or health problem. Regular shoes can't correct special foot problems.