

1. What is tiptoe walking?

Tiptoe walking is where a child will consistently walk on their toes rather than demonstrate a 'normal' heel-toe walking pattern.

When it happens without a diagnosed cause it is referred to as idiopathic toe walking.



2. How common is tiptoe walking in children?

Tiptoe walking is common in infants/toddlers who are learning how to walk. It is most commonly seen between the ages of 10-18 months as it helps with balance.

We refer to this as a "normal variant". In the majority of cases it has disappeared by 3 years of age.

Tiptoe walking can persist past the age of 3 without the presence of symptoms such as pain or muscle shortening. Up to 5% of healthy children under 10 years of age are tiptoe walkers.

3. What causes tiptoe walking?

Tiptoe walking is considered to be a normal part of development for children who are learning to walk; these infants will often walk on their toes as a way of feeling stable and balanced (as it keeps their foot/ankle complex in a fixed position.)

The majority of tiptoe walkers are idiopathic.

Sometimes there is an underlying medical cause for tiptoe walking such as cerebral palsy. There is also a link between sensory processing disorders (i.e. autism) and tiptoe walking.

4. What about those who tiptoe walk past the age of 2 years old?

Tiptoe walking usually resolves by 3 years of age.

Persistent tiptoe walking can be due to habit, or due to an underlying medical condition (CP, muscular dystrophy, Autism).

If a persistent tiptoe walker can achieve a flat foot position (or has ankle DF beyond plantargrade), and has no associated symptoms i.e. pain, functional limitations, then they do not require any intervention.

7. When to Refer?

In some cases, it will be appropriate to refer children on for further assessment, i.e. if there are concerns over persistent tiptoe walking, associated pain or functional limitations, and ankle contractures.

Please refer to the East Lancashire Paediatric Physiotherapy Referral guidance for Tiptoe Walking for information on when it is appropriate to refer, and which service you should refer to.

6. What advice should I give?

Reassure parents / guardians it can be normal for children to tiptoe walk. Making unnecessary referrals increases patient / parental anxiety and expectations.

Direct them to the East Lancashire Paediatric website for advice and information on:

- Tiptoe walking and why it can occur
- General advice to encourage continued normal development.
- General stretches to maintain ankle range.

5. What is the treatment for tiptoe walking?

Tiptoe walking in children under 3 years of age is considered to be a normal and expected part of development and requires no treatment.

Persistent tiptoe walking past the age of 3 years that has associated symptoms may physiotherapy stretching exercises.

Children who present with ankle contractures/unable to achieve ankle DF plantargrade may require serial casting and/or surgical intervention.



Tiptoe Walking

A guide for referrers