



September 2024 Newsletter

Physical Therapy to Address Toe Walking Beyond Age 2

Have you ever seen a child walk around on their toes, appearing carefree and upbeat as they bounce around the room? Adults often comment on how adorable this is or point out the potential for a dancing career. While a tip-toeing toddler is objectively cute, extended toe walking could also be a sign for potential concerns with a child's growth and development. Although some toe walking is normal for new walkers, it should not persist after age 2. In this newsletter, we outline one family's experience with pediatric PT to address their child's irregular toe walking pattern.

The Concerns

Parents reported their 3.5 year old son had walked on his toes since he first started at 10 months old. They had tried to teach him to walk "normally" from heel to toe, but it never lasted for more than 3-4 steps. This child also had difficulty bending down to play on the ground with his friends at school and his parents were worried this could impact his overall development.



The Explanations

The Physical Therapist examined this child's development and assessed his movement patterns. It was determined that hamstring and calf muscle tightness were causing the decreased range of motion in his knees and ankles. In addition, this led to overall core and hip weakness. Due to these limitations, he had difficulty staying in the "squat to play" position like most kids.



The Recommendations

Treatment for toe walking looks different for every child since there are many underlying causes. In this child's case, therapy focused on the specific muscle groups that were previously identified as overly tight and/or weak. The therapist began by stretching the child's hamstrings and calves for increased range of motion, then introduced



child friendly activities designed to strengthen glutes, core, and lower leg muscles. All of these exercises helped to improve "dorsiflexion", (the backward bending motion of the foot) which is essential when learning to master the "heel to toe" walking pattern. During the session, PT speaks with parents about ways to duplicate these activities at home.

The Takeaway

Because many different factors can lead to toe walking in children, it is important to seek help from a physical therapist to determine the best course of action. This specific child's difficulties stemmed from tightness and weakness of the core and lower leg muscles, so his PT created home program activities that included a variety of stretches, as well as strengthening exercises disguised as play. These included activities on a scooter, balance board, hurdles, foam pads, tactile discs, and more. With continued work in PT and consistent use of the specialized home exercise program, he stopped walking on his toes and developed age-appropriate movement patterns so he could fully participate in activities with his peers.



If this child's story sounds familiar - or if you believe your child would benefit from PT - call and speak with a member of our pediatric team or visit our website at taylorphysicaltherapy.com



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