

START SCHOOL KIDS ON THE RIGHT FOOT

With the new school year upon us, our thoughts turn to school shoe shopping and the potential stress this can invite. We've all been there: tired parents, exhausted children and a range of shoes to choose from. It can be overwhelming and enough to make anyone's head spin. Added to this, we are all dealing with the impact of COVID and its requirements – from scanning in QR codes, to wearing masks, to remaining vigilant to local cases.

Yet good news does exist. Adele McGarry, podiatrist, and member of the Australian Podiatry Association shares her top tips to help guarantee a positive school shoe shopping experience – and happy children who are comfortable in their new school shoes!

This advice comes off the back of [overseas research](#) which indicates 69% of parents and carers plan to shop in store for their child's school shoes, despite the challenges COVID presents in the retail sector.

#1 Step into your children's shoes

Not literally perhaps, but it pays to consider how your children feel about being poured into a new pair of school shoes, given most of 2021 was spent barefoot or in less supportive footwear.

In fact, research commissioned by the [Australian Podiatry Association](#) shows that during the peak of 2021's COVID lockdowns, around 70% of Australians wore less supportive shoes (or went barefoot). Interestingly, one in three people concurrently noticed an increase of pain or discomfort in their feet and lower limbs. The upshot of this pain was that activities markedly decreased. In fact, 16% of respondents stopped participating in leisurely activities such as walking their dog or playing with their kids.

So, where does this leave our children? Adele McGarry has the following advice for parents and carers.

“My advice is to go gently when shopping for school shoes. We've all been through a lot last year and that certainly includes our children. Plan the shopping trip for when your children are well rested and there are no conflicting activities on the horizon (you may need more time than you think!). It's ideal to seek out the advice of your local podiatrist before shopping (especially if you have orthotic insoles, previous foot pain or tricky to fit feet), so you know exactly what features to look for in your child's school shoes, or seek out professional advice in-store.

“Every child's feet are different, and the old adage that one type/brand doesn't fit all is certainly true when it comes to school shoe shopping.”

If parents and carers are looking specifically for school shoes that are endorsed by the Australian Podiatry Association, then [Colorado](#) and [Alpha](#) are the only school shoes that are endorsed.

#2 Pay attention to the details

While the Australian Podiatry Association has [released consumer advice](#) on what to look for when school shoe shopping, these aspects can be best summed up in these details, explains Adele.

“The details matter when shopping for school shoes,” Adele says. “Firstly, check that your child's shoe is flexible around their toe area to support a range of activities. Then ensure that the arch section is firm to

support your child during weight bearing activities. And don't forget to also measure a thumb's width from the top of their longest toe to the end of the shoe, to allow necessary wiggle room."

Adele shares one last trick which may surprise readers. "Lastly, when their shoe is off, try bending the heel backwards to see if it moves. Ideally the heel counter should stay firm to support their heel. If it moves, then the shoe is more likely suited to training activities that benefit from a lightweight shoe, and perhaps not for school wear. All of these tips can help you to get in and out of the store as efficiently as possible, while not skimping on important details when it comes to choosing school shoes."

#3 Pain is not inevitable

Parents will be pleased to learn that Adele wants to dispel the myth that school shoes need to be 'broken in' first, along with the notion that some initial pain is inevitable.

"Remembering back to my own childhood - The messaging around school shoes were that you needed to 'break in school shoes'," Adele says. "This is a myth which should be kicked to the curb. A pair of well fitting school shoes should be comfortable, fit securely on the feet and allow kids to perform at their best whether it be walking, running, jumping or climbing. So give them a good test in store.

"There certainly are elements to look out for to help create this outcome, such as getting a professional to check the length, width and heel fit to ensure a secure and comfortable fit for your child's feet. If any of these areas are too tight or loose, your child may experience foot and lower limb problems when wearing their school shoes.

"Ultimately however, getting professionally fitted by a qualified podiatrist, or an in-store footwear professional, will protect against such fitting errors. If your child is in pain returning to school or their normal activities, has tricky to fit feet, orthotics or special footwear needs, then seeing a podiatrist for thorough investigation and professional advice is recommended."

For the latest foot health tips, fact sheets and consumer resources head to www.foothealthaustralia.org.au

For school shoes that are endorsed by the Australian Podiatry Association, choose [Colorado](#) and [Alpha](#). More information is at this link: www.foothealthaustralia.org.au/foot-health-products

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ABOUT AUSTRALIAN PODIATRY ASSOCIATION

The Australian Podiatry Association is the largest and oldest peak body representing podiatry and promoting foot health in Australia. As the leading provider of quality continuing education for podiatrists, we support our members with opportunities to develop their professional career, uphold standards and build connections. We are committed to the advancement of podiatry to improve foot health in the community.

ABOUT ADELE MCGARRY

Adele is a member of the Australian Podiatry Association and the Australian Paediatric Podiatry special interest group and holds Bachelor degrees in Podiatry and Applied Science (Human Movement Studies) from the Queensland University of Technology. Adele is based in Brisbane, Queensland and she currently works in private clinical practice with a special interest in helping paediatric patients with their foot and lower limb health.