

Bow legs and knock knees in children

ORTHOPAEDIC FACT SHEET 3

Bow legs and knock knees are a normal part of a child's growth.

1. Bow legs (*genu varum*)

It is normal for infants to be born with bow legs. Bow legs may become more obvious in toddlers as they begin to walk. When a child with bow legs stands with their feet and ankles together, the knees stay apart (Figure 1). In most children bow legs disappear without treatment by the time they are two or three years old. This is often followed by a period of time with knock knees.

2. Knock knees (*genu valgum*)

Knock knees are common in children between the ages of three and five. When a child with knock knees stands with their knees together, the feet and ankles stay apart (Figure 2). In most children the legs gradually straighten with growth, and are usually in a normal position by the time they are eight years old.

Because bow legs and knock knees usually correct naturally, special shoes, braces or exercises are not recommended. If you are concerned about the shape of your child's legs, it may be helpful to take a photograph of your child every six months to show your doctor. Photograph your child standing with their knees facing forward.

Bow legs and knock knees are normal in young children as they grow. However, visit your child's doctor if:

- your child's bow legs or knock knees are severe
- bow legs persist after age three
- knock knees worsen after age eight
- only one leg is affected
- your child has pain or a limp
- your child is unusually short for their age.

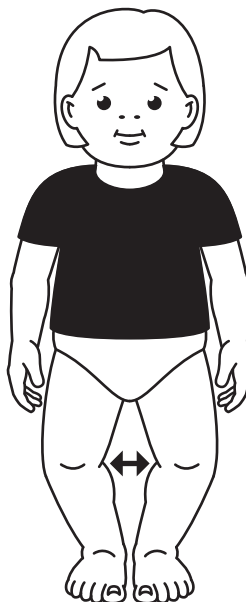


Figure 1. In bow legs, when the feet and ankles are together, the knees remain apart

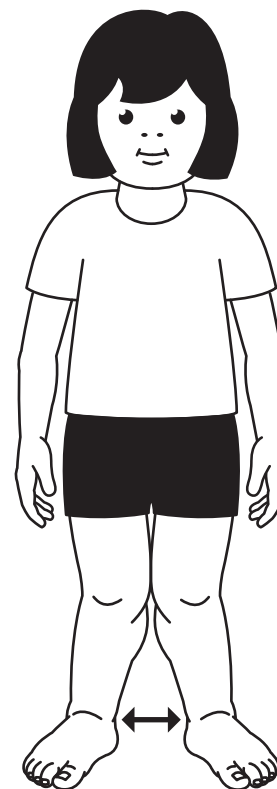


Figure 2. In knock knees, when the knees are together, the feet and ankles remain apart