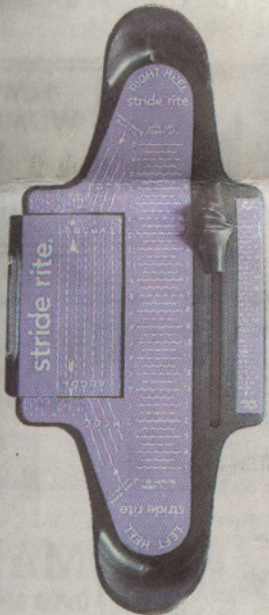


How to buy shoes  for a young child

FOOT NOTES



The Brannock Device

What it is: A foot-measurer you'll find in pretty much any retail shoe store.

Why you need to use it: Shoe sizes and foot sizes are not the same, and the foot needs adequate room within the footwear for comfort and performance. The Brannock Device is designed to indicate the correct shoe size, allowing enough room for comfort.

You should know: There are many different models. Unless you're in a store that sells only children's shoes, make sure to ask for the Junior Brannock Device.

For details on how to use it: Visit brannock.com.



CARMINE GALASSO/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Eric Blackler, 2, the reporter's son, helps salesperson Janelle show how feet are measured at the Stride Rite at Garden State Plaza, Paramus.

By **DELIA BLACKLER PERRETTA**
SPECIAL TO THE RECORD

With spring two days away, it might be time to buy your little one some new shoes.

But how will you know whether you've got the perfect fit when the person trying them on can barely say "Mama" and "Dada?"

Relax. We're about to take out some of the guesswork.

Whether you buy Italian saddle shoes from a high-end boutique or a pair of sneakers with pressure-activated blinking lights from a self-service store, you'll learn that the most important consideration isn't style — it's finding a shoe that fits your child's foot *and* your budget.

Time for shoes again?

The most common foot-related question parents ask their pediatricians, our experts say, is how often they should buy shoes for their infant or toddler.

The answer? "It depends on how fast the baby is growing," says Robert A. Schultz, an orthopedic surgeon at Garden State Orthopedic Associates in Fair Lawn.

If there is a rule of thumb, most of our experts believe it's important to check a child's shoe size at least every three months. After all, an infant or young toddler won't be able to say "Mommy, my feet hurt — my shoes are too small."

"The old grandma test of press-
See **KIDS' SHOES** Page F-12

Kids' shoes: It all comes down to finding the right

From Page F-1

ing the toe is only one way of measuring, and it's usually the least accurate," says Steve Wilkos, Nordstrom kids shoes divisional merchandise manager, who says the following telltale signs can be good indicators that it's time to buy new shoes:

- There is excessive wear at the

tip of the bottom of the shoe.

- There is wear on the sides of the upper part of a shoe.

- You're using more or less of the shoelace than normal.

- The foot has redness, swelling, or blisters.

- The shoes are harder to put on than before.

- Younger children are tugging

at their feet, or older toddlers are fighting you when you try to put the shoes on.

"They're like drunk sailors when they're learning to walk," says Glenn R. Haber, a podiatrist at Englewood Podiatry in Englewood, "so if you have a shoe that's unstable and doesn't fit well, on top of the child's own instability,

you're adding insult to injury."

Finding the perfect fit

When doing the measuring yourself, head straight for a Brannock Device — the metal instrument you'll find at most shoe stores. What you want to know is the length and width of your child's foot while he or she is standing. Also, the widest part of the foot should match the widest part of the shoe.

Wilkos says the final measurement, which is thickness in relation to the height of the foot, can only be done by watching your child walk in the shoe to see if it's a comfortable fit and eyeballing whether the foot is fitting to the top of the shoe.

Remember: Even if the Brannock Device says Johnny is a 6B, that doesn't mean you should buy shoes without your child present.

"Different shoe designers tend to make shoe sizes a little differently — there are no perfect sizes," Haber says.

Also, because most of us have one foot that is bigger than the other, "it's best to fit the larger foot," according to Schultz.

Quantity vs. quality

While some adults have a pair of shoes for just about every occasion, it's not necessary for infants and toddlers to have a closet packed with them.

"If you're keeping up with the

growth of the foot, the child can stay with the shoe until the foot outgrows the shoe," Schultz says.

Wendy Yang, vice president of product and marketing for Stride Rite Children's Group, agrees: "Assuming the shoe is made properly, one pair is enough for a child."

But some experts feel that if money isn't an issue, it's worth getting two pairs. Haber, for one, believes switching from shoe to shoe is good for arch maintenance.

Pricey or penny-wise?

If you feel the urge to buy your child a couple of pairs of designer European boots or sandals every few months, you could wind up spending hundreds of dollars on a pint-sized shoe wardrobe. But you don't necessarily have to spend a lot of money for the best shoes.

Even Wilkos, who works for a higher-end department store, says, "It's less about price and more about fit."

In fact, Schultz advises against buying high-end shoes because often, he says, parents will try to get their money's worth out of them by having the child wear them for too long.

"If you know what you're doing in terms of fit," Haber says, "it doesn't matter where you buy the shoe."

Secondhand shoes

Sometimes parents are tempted

People aren't asked to remove their shoes in here. Imagine that.



100% FINANCING TO QUALIFIED HOMEOWNERS

CALL THE PROFESSIONALS

BUDGET - BUILD **ONE STOP CO**

to put their little ones in older siblings' shoes to save money, but it's not recommended.

"People are like snowflakes, and so are feet — no two are the same," Haber says.

Wilkos adds, "When we're talking about a toddler who's learning to walk, there are 32 sizes to choose from. So to take a shoe from one child to the next means the size has to be right, and you also have to hope the shoe hasn't formed too much."

First footwear

What about baby shoes? Are they *really* necessary?

According to Schultz, the answer is no.

"We've noticed in Third-World nations where kids don't wear shoes or confining shoes, they don't get the number of deformities that we get in Western countries," he says.

Even though people don't develop flat foot, bunions, hammer toes, and arch strain until adulthood, he says, children predisposed to these problems increase their risk by wearing ill-fitting shoes.

Says Haber: "Homes can be a very dangerous place to walk for anyone, let alone a baby who's unstable, so shoes should be worn just for sheer protection."

If you must get shoes for your baby, though, Stride Rite's Yang says "to look for bottoms that offer some traction to assist in grip" — which is definitely a necessity for infants learning to toddle.