

Careful Steps towards healthy feet

By CATHY GORDON

REMEMBER those two appendages at the bottom of your legs? No? They are your FEET.

You may ask why attention is being drawn to these often unattractive extremities.

It's because many of us forget the importance of feet — the bits of us which have to carry the rest of our bodies through decades and countless miles.

Our tootsies should be looked after from birth to adulthood to avoid the deformities that may rear their ugly head many years later.

One person who's qualified to give expert advice on how to look after feet is Charles Boyce, who fits shoes for the Royal children.

He says: "Eighty per cent of foot problems in old age can be directly related to ill-fitting shoes as children.

"Our feet are very important to us. We do not give them enough care."

Boyce, the fitting service manager of a company which is celebrating 200 years in the footwear industry this year, warns that the bones in children's feet are very soft and supple and can easily be distorted in ill-fitting shoes.

A baby's foot has no rigid bones, so without feeling pain, children can have their feet deformed for life. Even tight socks and stretch baby garments can cause trouble.

Children's feet continue to develop until the late teens so the right shoes are vital throughout the early years.

Bunions, corns and callouses are all painful horrors likely to occur in adulthood if youngsters wear shoes which are too small, too big, with very pointed toes, or if girls start wearing high heels at too early an age.

Parents who want to protect their children's feet should ensure their shoes are properly fitted from the earliest years.

Boyce, who has fitted the royal children Prince William and Prince Harry, stresses the impor-



ance of continuing to look after feet as an adult.

"I think it is very important to carry on all through life. We do not spend enough time looking after our feet compared with the time we spend on the rest of our bodies."

He adds: "I do not say that ladies should stop wearing high-heeled court shoes, but every shoe has its place and its purpose".

He says that the right shoes should be worn for the right occasion adding that we should always choose shoes with leather uppers and leather and cotton linings.

What is his message to mums who want to look after their children's feet properly?

"Always go to trained shoe-fitters, who will measure the child's feet and spend time actually fitting the shoes."

Measuring is important, but what is also vital is to choose a shoe which matches the shape of the foot.

The current fashion trend, which sees young girls wearing flat, lace-up shoes and boots, has the thumbs-up from Boyce.

He says: "Five years ago you couldn't get a girl aged 11 upwards to wear a lace-up shoe. The trend at the moment is marvelous."

There are many measures which can be taken to keep children's feet in shape.

- Foot size (both feet) should be checked every two or three months by a trained fitter as feet grow in fits and starts. Never try to guess the size.

- Only shoes with width fittings should be chosen as these are essential for a correct fit.

- Half to three-quarters of an inch space should be left beyond the longest toe and the inside edge of the shoe should be straight enough to avoid pressure on the big toe.

- There should be a snug fit around the heel and preferably a fastener across the instep to prevent the foot from sliding forward.

- Leather shoes should be selected as these allow the foot to "breathe" and soles should be flexible as well as hard-wearing.

- Do not hasten your child's first steps. Your child will decide when it is time to walk.

People of all ages should always keep feet clean and cut their toe-nails straight across.

John Hicks, chairman of Britain's National Foot Health Council — a small charity says that a lot of deformities are to be traced back to origins of badly fitting shoes, socks and stretch baby garments.

He warns that damage does not become apparent until 30 or 40 years later.

Says Hicks: "People take great care of baby's head, hands and teeth. There are three chances with teeth — milk, permanent and very adequate false teeth. But with feet, you only have one pair." — IPS