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SENSE OF STYLE: KIDS, DOCTORS SPLIT ON SHOES

Susan Felt, The Arizona Republic

Kids are as finicky about their shoes as they are about what tunes are on their iPod.

But style rarely ensures safety or, in the case of feet, health. Flip-flops may be loved by everyone from preschoolers to college students, but are they the best choice for a growing 10-year-old? And what risks do the popular "skater" or "board" shoes pose when kids only wear them untied?

These four styles are what many of the well-shod are slipping on their feet this school year. Here's why kids like them and what Phoenix podiatrists Tim Harlan and Brett Roeder have to say about them:

Flip-flops

Kid's take: "They're comfortable and easy to get on and off." -- Tabitha Arment, 12, seventh-grader at Shea Middle School, Phoenix.

Podiatrists' take: There's no arch support, no shock absorption. They're not supportive. The only thing they protect you from is the heat from the cement. For kids with flat feet, definitely not a good choice. Platform flip-flops Kid's take: "They make me taller than my sister. But they were weird walking." -- Ashley Arment, 14, Tabitha's sister, a freshman at Shadow Mountain High School, Phoenix.

Podiatrists' take: They have the same problems as flip-flops plus the elevation adds to the instability.

Skater or board shoe

Kid's take: "I like the style. It looks weird to wear a skater shoe tied." -- Quentin Williams, 10, fifth-grader at Madison Meadows Elementary School, Phoenix.

Podiatrists' take: Some can be very good. But you lose the stability of the upper part of the shoe when they're untied. And you can slide out of them if you're running, which puts a child at risk for injury.

Slip-on 1 1/8-inch heel moccasin

Kid's take: "They make me look taller." -- Lauren Spain-Brungaret, 10, fifth-grader at Desert Valley Elementary School, Glendale.

Podiatrists' take: No one should wear a shoe with a heel above a half-inch. This is where bunions and hammertoes can begin because it puts more pressure on the front of the foot.

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