

Orthotics is a specialist health field that's about using assistive technology to support and align the body to improve function.

If you're new to orthotics, it's natural to be unsure what it's about and how it can help your child, which is where this booklet comes in.

Questions? Feel free to get in touch.

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A starter's guide to Orthotics

A few answers to common questions

Key points

- ▶ Orthotics is an Allied Health discipline that specialises in using assistive technology to align and support parts of the body to improve function
- ▶ There's lots of different orthoses, which are often custom made to achieve a specific purpose
- ▶ Lower limb orthoses are commonly used to control weight bearing posture and improve stability and walking ability
- ▶ Orthoses are named by the parts of the body they affect, such as AFO (Ankle foot orthosis) or FO (Foot orthosis)
- ▶ A health practitioner who is specialised in this area is called an orthotist

Common lower limb orthoses

Ankle Foot Orthoses (AFOs)

There are a range of different types of AFOs. Each has a slightly different function and is prescribed depending on the individual's requirements.

Ankle foot orthoses are used for a variety of purposes, including:

- Assisting stability
- Prevention of deformity
- Improving walking
- Protecting recent surgery

AFOs are custom-made to each individual's requirements by taking a plaster cast of the leg and foot, moulded into the correct position. The mould is then shaped by the orthotist and used to manufacture the final orthosis, which takes around four weeks.

Wear time for AFOs will vary from person to person depending on their condition, age, activity level and the goals of the orthotic therapy. Some AFOs are used full-time day and night, whilst others may only be required for specific activities.

Foot Orthoses (FOs)

Foot orthoses are custom-made insoles worn inside a shoe to align the foot while weight-bearing. They are used to alleviate pain, improve stability and endurance, and prevent foot posture deterioration.



Foot orthoses are usually custom made from a foam cast of the feet. They are manufactured from varying densities of durable EVA foam to provide both comfort and support.

They are usually ready to be fitted around two weeks from casting, which involves checking the fit on the feet, shaping them to fit inside shoes and checking the walking alignment. It's important to understand that foot orthoses work in combination with footwear. A sturdy, supportive pair of shoes is important to get the most out of your orthoses.

Your orthotist can assess footwear at the casting appointment, so make sure you bring them along!

Supra-Malleolar Orthoses (SMOs)

SMOs are thin, closely fitting rigid orthoses that encapulate the foot and fit inside shoes. SMOs are designed to provide more stability than foot orthoses for more complex biomechanical issues, such as developmental delay or neurological conditions.

SMOs give a more three-dimensional control of foot posture, preventing collapse of the midfoot and abduction of the forefoot. While they are stiffer than foot orthoses, they are custom made to fit comfortably and are well tolerated by the majority of kids.

What to bring to an appointment

- Funding details, such as NDIS plan
- Footwear, more options are better if you're unsure
- Current or last orthoses, if you've had them before
- Treatment goals, orthopaedic and physio contact details

