

About Custom Arch Supports

Orthotics

This handout explains custom arch supports, why they are used, how they are made, and what to expect when using them.

What are orthotics?

Custom arch supports (*orthotics*) are used to treat foot problems such as bunions, heel spurs, and arch fatigue. They are custom-made for you, from a cast or scan taken of your foot.

Orthotics are much more effective than the “arch supports” you can buy at the drugstore. They give more support and can change the way your foot works when you walk. Even though they are stiff, orthotics are very comfortable since they are molded to your foot.

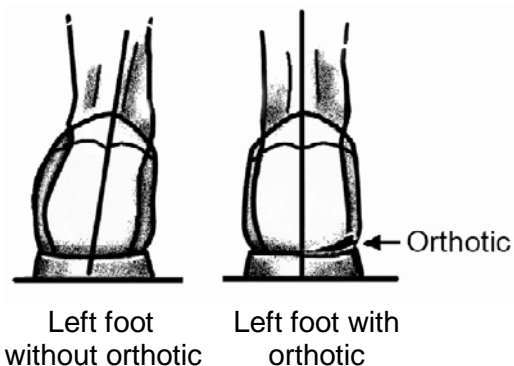
In some ways, orthotics are like eyeglasses. Over-the-counter glasses work for only a few people. Prescription glasses almost always work better because they are custom-made for you.

Orthotics are also like braces for your teeth because they straighten out a part of your body. But no one can see your orthotics and, if they are fitted correctly, you will not even be aware of them in your shoes.

Custom arches can be inserted into most of your footwear. You can wear them all day, every day. If you plan to buy new shoes, wait to go shopping until you have your new orthotics. Take them with you when you go to try on shoes.

When are orthotics used?

Orthotics are used to treat several foot and ankle conditions. They may also be used to treat knee and low back conditions.



A custom arch support can correct your foot alignment and change the way you walk.

These are some of the most common conditions where custom arches are used:

- Heel pain (from *plantar fasciitis* or heel spur)
- Bunions
- Tendinitis
- Ankle instability
- *Vallux limitus*
- Fallen arches
- High arches
- Morton's neuroma
- Metatarsal pain or callous
- Cuboid syndrome
- Limb length discrepancy
- *Pes planovalgus* (flatfoot)

How are orthotics made?

Orthotics come in many shapes and sizes. The material we use depends on your type of foot problem, weight, activity level, age, and the type of shoes you like to wear.

Orthotics can be made out of *graphite* (very thin for use in dress shoes), *polypropylene* (very flexible for athletic activities), and many other materials. Some are very soft and others are very rigid. Some may be *full-length* (out to the toes) or *length* (out to the ball of the foot).

Taking Casts of Your Feet

Your doctor will take casts of your feet for orthotics. This will take about 30 minutes. When you come to the clinic for this visit:

- Wear shorts or sweats so that we can measure your knees.
- Bring in some of the shoe styles you like to wear. This will help us prescribe the right orthotics for you.

At this visit:

- We will measure your hips, knees, and ankles.
- Your doctor will look at how you stand and walk.
- *Slipper casts* will be put on your feet to capture their shape and size. These casts and a prescription will then be sent to a lab where orthotics are made.

When will my orthotics be ready?

After casting, it will take 2 to 3 weeks for the lab to make a model of your foot, make your orthotics, and send them back to us. We will call you when they are ready for you to pick them up.

When you come to pick up your orthotics, your doctor or nurse will check the fit. After that, you can start getting used to wearing them.

Wearing Your Orthotics

When you first start wearing your orthotics, you will feel them, but you should not have discomfort.

The first 2 weeks are your break-in period. During this time, slowly increase how long you wear your orthotics. If you have any discomfort, take them out right away and then try them again in a couple of hours. After about 1 to 2 weeks, you should be able to wear them all the time.

The goal of this break-in period is to get to the point where you hardly know your orthotics are in your shoes, but you miss them when they are not.

Shoes

Your orthotics are made to fit in most shoes. We might need to see your dress shoes to figure out if the orthotics can fit in them. If your tennis, running, or walking shoes have removable insoles, you may need to take them out when you wear your orthotics.

Your First Checkup

We will see you in about 2 to 4 weeks for a checkup. At this visit, be sure to tell us if your orthotics do not feel right or if they have not corrected your foot problem. They may need to be adjusted. We may be able to make some adjustments while you wait. Other adjustments will require that we send your orthotics back to the lab.

Be sure to bring in any shoes that are causing problems when you come for your checkup visit.

Care of Your Orthotics

Orthotics do not need very much care. If they get dirty, you can clean them with soap and water. If they squeak in your shoes, you can use talcum or other foot powder in the shoe.

Check your orthotics from time to time to make sure there are no cracks or defects. Orthotics may last several years, but *heel posts* (that support the rear of your foot) and *topcovers* (that protect your foot from the orthotic) may need to be redone every year.

Most patients come in once a year to have their orthotics checked for fit and wear. Children outgrow their orthotics when their shoe size goes up by about 2 sizes.

Cost

A pair of orthotics costs about \$600. This includes casting, making the model of your feet, and making the arches. Some insurance companies pay for them and some do not. At your next office visit, we can help you check if your insurance covers orthotic therapy.

Questions?

Your questions are important. Call your doctor or health care provider if you have questions or concerns.

Bone and Joint Center:
206-598-4288