Wrightington, Wigan and Leigh Teaching Hospitals
NHS Foundation Trust

A Guide to your Ankle Foot Orthosis (AFO)

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Patient Information

Community Surgical Appliances

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What is an Ankle Foot Orthosis (AFO)?

An Ankle Foot Orthosis or AFO, is a brace (Custom or stock) worn on the lower leg. It is designed to control the range of motion in the foot and ankle, and maintain them in an optimum position for standing and walking. Some AFOs have a joint/hinge at the ankle, whilst others are fixed in one position, and they may be worn on one foot or both feet.





The AFO will be matched to your specific needs – as each person is unique, so is their response to treatment.

What are AFOs prescribed for?

AFOs are prescribed for a number of reasons, including:

- To make walking easier
- To keep your foot and ankle in a better position
- To provide support to weakened muscles
- To reduce the risk of falls
- To reduce pain

What shoes can be worn with an AFO?

The AFO should not come into direct contact with skin, so you should wear cotton socks or tights beneath the device. Ensure they are pulled up to avoid any wrinkles. You must wear the correct footwear in order for the AFO to work properly. The shoes needs to be big enough to fit the AFO inside, but they can be ordinary high-street shoes. When deciding

your footwear choice, consider:

- Lace or Velcro fastenings are preferred: the lower they open the better.
- A removable insole is useful to make room for the AFO
- Slip-on and open-heeled shoes are not appropriate
- Adequate depth and width is required

Take your AFO with you when buying the shoes, so you can try them on together. It is important that shoes are worn whilst wearing AFOs. Do not wear the AFO without shoes, as it can be slippery.

Putting on the AFO

1. Unfasten all straps on the AFO.
2. Ensure you are seated, with your hip and knee bent at a 90 degree angle.
3. Pull up your socks and make sure there are no creases in them.
4. Ensure your heel is right at the back of the splint.
5. Secure the strap/s firmly.
6. Put on the shoe.

How long should the AFO be worn for?

It takes a while to get used to wearing an AFO, and it may feel uncomfortable to start with. Build up wear time over a few weeks, until you can wear it as required:

- Day 1: 30-60 minutes
- Day 2: 1-2 hours
- Day 3: 2-4 hours
- Day 4-7: 4-6 hours
- Week 2: 6+ hours, or then as required

The length of time you should wear the AFO will vary. Some users wear them constantly, others only for a few hours. Your orthotist will give you recommendations tailored for you. Steps, stairs and slopes can feel very different when you are using an AFO. Take extra care

and use handrails where possible.

Skin care

- You should check the skin around the ankle and foot (including the sole of the foot), every time you take off your AFO, especially over the bony areas and around the edges of the AFO.
- Don’t worry if you see red marks – these are normal and should disappear within 30 minutes following removal of the AFO. If they do not disappear in this timescale, please stop wearing the AFO and contact your Orthotic Department.
- If you notice any blisters or sores, you should stop using the AFO and contact your Orthotic Department for advice, as it may need adjusting.
- Be particularly careful with visual checks if you suffer from poor sensation.

Care of the AFO

It is important that the AFO is kept clean and in good working order.

- Use a damp cloth to wipe over the AFO. Straps or padding might discolour with time, but this is normal and does not affect the effectiveness of the device.
- Keep the AFO away from direct heat, e.g radiators. You can dry with a towel after cleaning, or else leave to dry naturally.
- Check your AFO daily for signs of damage or cracks in the material. If found, stop using the device immediately and contact your Orthotist.
- If the AFO has ankle joints, check daily that all screws and fastenings are secure. When handling the device, be careful not to trap fingers in the joint.
- Ensure all straps are working properly. If they have worn down, or break, contact your Orthotist straight away.
- Do not try to adjust the AFO yourself, under any circumstances.

Contact Details

Orthotics Department:
Aspull Health and Wellbeing Centre,
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