



Therapy Services Fact Sheet

Foot Orthoses



Australian Government
Department of Health and Ageing

What are foot orthoses?

Orthoses (otherwise known as orthotics) are shoe inserts, designed to support and improve the function of the foot. There are various forms of orthoses ranging from over the counter arch supports that can be found in chemists, to custom made devices prescribed by your podiatrist. It is the latter that podiatrists recommend as they are tailor made to suit the individual's needs and biomechanics.

Who needs foot orthoses?

Orthoses can be prescribed for people of all ages and for various foot and lower leg problems. They can be prescribed for children, sports-people, working people and the elderly. Conditions requiring orthoses can vary from flat feet, arthritis, heel pain, leg pain, sports or work related injuries, inherited foot conditions, ulcerations, corns, callous and more.

Are prescription orthoses made of hard materials?

Not necessarily. Podiatrists prescribe two main types of orthoses.

Accommodative and Functional. Both help to support, align and improve foot function. However, they are generally made using different materials and may vary in shape and size. The accommodative foot orthoses are usually more flexible and softer than the functional foot orthoses.

Accommodative foot orthoses are used to cushion, pad or relieve pressure from a painful or injured area on the bottom of the foot as well as control abnormal foot function.

Functional foot orthoses are primarily prescribed to control abnormal foot and lower leg function. They are made out of rigid materials such as polypropylene.

What foot orthoses do I require?

The podiatrist will prescribe the foot orthoses suitable for you. This prescription culminates only after a comprehensive assessment of the client. Apart from the clinical biomechanical assessment, the podiatrist must also take into consideration the activity levels, client needs and importantly, the type of footwear. Suitable footwear is required not only for the foot orthoses to fit in the shoes, but also to function well in the shoes. This is of paramount importance.

How do they make foot orthoses?

The manufacturing process of foot orthoses is highly technical and requires a lot of time. Once deciding that a client requires prescription foot orthoses, the podiatrist must then take a cast (negative cast) of the client's feet. This cast is performed with both feet held in a certain position. The cast captures all the contours of the complex foot. The cast as well as a prescription is then sent to the foot orthoses laboratory and manufactured accordingly. Upon receiving the finished foot orthoses from the laboratory, the podiatrist ensures that they are correct and fit well in the designated shoes. The podiatrist will then inform the client how and when to wear the foot orthoses as well as reviewing the client when appropriate.