

What are orthotics?

Orthotics are orthopedic devices that are used to treat a variety of biomechanical foot disorders. Whenever a person's foot is not functioning as designed, the weight of the body is not properly transferred and distributed. As a result, pain and tenderness can develop in the foot, ankle, and the surrounding muscles. Orthotics work to relieve pain by realigning and supporting the ligaments and bones of the foot properly, so that the foot can function as normal.

Orthotics can be made of any number of materials and range greatly in terms of price, effectiveness, and ease of availability. Simple orthotics, such as the shoe insoles and gel heel cups sold in general goods stores, are inexpensive and widely available. These over-the-counter orthotics can relieve mild foot discomfort by taking excess pressure off of sensitive areas of the foot. They are relatively ineffective, though, at treating moderate to more severe foot disorders.

The next step-up in orthotics are custom-tailored devices that are specifically designed to meet the needs of the particular individual. Such orthotics usually require a doctor's prescription since an impression of the foot, called a cast, needs to be made in order to identify those areas of the feet that are out of alignment. The resulting cast is sent to an orthotic laboratory so that a custom device can be produced to correct any misalignments. The orthotic is then fitted to the patient's shoe to help keep the foot properly aligned.

Since perfectly aligned feet are uncommon, nearly everyone stands to benefit from the use of an orthotic device. Orthotics can rarely cause harm to the foot. Instead they both prevent and alleviate any number of foot disorders that cause pain, fatigue, or discomfort in individuals who are otherwise happy and healthy. The extent to which your foot is maligned will determine the exact type of orthotic best suited for your foot.

How do you know if you may need an orthotic? Consider the following symptoms:

One side of the sole of your shoe typically wears out faster than the other side (the soles of your worn shoes are not flat)

Your feet point inward or outward more than normal when you walk

You have frequent heel, ankle, knee, hip, or lower back pain

You frequently sprain or twist your ankle

You have flat feet or feet with a high arch

You have foot pain that you notice when taking your first steps in the morning, or after getting up from a sitting position

Your shins frequently hurt or ache

Your toes are crooked

Your feet generally hurt after you spend more than a few moments standing on them

If you have one or more of these symptoms, you may be a good candidate for an orthotic device. Keep in mind that pain is your body's way of signaling you that something is wrong. Sore feet are no exception to this rule. Ignoring pain can intensify problems and lead into much more serious disorders, so it is important to find the underlying cause for your foot pain. Contact Footworks Orthotics to set up an appointment for an initial exam and find out if orthotics are right for you.

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