

## **Guidelines for AFOs and KAFOs**

### **Introduction**

If this is your first orthosis, you may have some questions about its use and care. An understanding of the orthosis may ease some of your initial concerns.

Your orthosis was designed in accordance with the highest standards of modern medical technology by an orthotist, an expert trained to design, fabricate, fit and maintain the device you are receiving. You will be given a follow up appointment to make sure that everything is functioning properly.

In the meantime, you will be getting accustomed to wearing your new orthosis. Ideally you will benefit from improved stability, better gait and reduced pain, but the orthosis will require some attention and care from you in order to make this happen.

Often, a new orthosis needs a slow break-in regimen. If this is the case, your orthotist will discuss a wear schedule for you, or advise you on increasing your wear time. It is very important to follow this schedule; ignoring your orthotist's advice will increase your risk for complications, and may prolong or even add to any pain you are experiencing. It may take several weeks before wearing the device feels comfortable, so don't be discouraged.

Heeding the following tips will make wearing an orthosis a positive experience, and will allow the orthosis to function properly.

### **General Wear**

A metal ankle/foot orthosis (AFO) or metal knee/ankle/foot orthosis (KAFO) will be attached to a shoe or a plastic shoe insert. It should always be worn with socks or stockings that are changed daily. Metal orthoses require little cleaning, just a periodic wipe down with a clean, damp cloth. Any cuffs or other type of fabric padding that touches the skin should be wiped clean every day, but NOT submerged in water. Dry the orthosis thoroughly after cleaning to avoid any rusting or corrosion of the metal parts.

A plastic AFO or KAFO will be designed to go inside footwear, and must ALWAYS be worn with a shoe. The orthosis will be very slippery and unstable without a shoe to grip the floor, and wearing the device without a shoe will increase the risk of a fall and minimize the benefits the patient may receive. While donning the orthosis, you can either fasten the orthosis first and then put on the shoe, or slide the orthosis into the shoe and then slip your foot into both. You will determine which method is more natural for your situation. The use of a shoehorn may make the process of donning easier.

Always wear a sock or similar garment under the orthosis to reduce friction and protect your skin. We recommend a synthetic wicking sock instead of cotton socks. Remember to keep the sock wrinkle-free without placing excessive pressure on your toes. Using talcum powder and changing your sock after you have perspired will also help keep you comfortable.

When wearing a plastic orthosis that fits into multiple types of shoes, it is important to maintain the same heel height for which the orthosis was designed. Excessive height increases the risk for strain on your knees and back and creates instability. Heels which are too low may also increase the risk of knee and back pain. Shoes selected to be worn with an orthosis should provide sufficient support; slippers, sandals, and loafers will not allow the orthosis to function properly. The ideal shoe will have four or more eyelets, and will have the extra depth to accommodate the AFO or KAFO.

Patients wearing either metal or plastic orthoses should regularly check for signs of skin pressure and irregular shoe break down, and should report either to the orthotist without delay.

### **Self Examination**

Your orthosis was designed to fit you properly and provide the highest degree of comfort. Just like with a new pair of shoes, though, a break-in period may occur before the orthosis feels natural. During this time, follow your orthotist's instructions on wear times and on how to build up your tolerance for the device.

A properly fit orthosis exerts a firm, steady pressure. It should not cause any sharp pain or create bruises, calluses, or blisters. Should this occur, call us immediately and arrange an appointment for evaluation or adjustment.

Occasionally, extended periods of standing or hot, humid weather will result in some swelling. Remove the orthosis and elevate your leg until the swelling subsides. If it persists or becomes painful, notify your orthotist at once.

It is also important to maintain a relatively consistent weight. Your orthosis was designed for your current weight and dimensions, and any significant gain or loss may cause improper fit. You will need to visit us if this should occur. Children who are experiencing growth should be monitored at regular intervals to maintain proper fit.

Daily visual examination of the skin in contact with the orthosis should become a habit. A new orthosis may cause some redness that should disappear within 15-30 minutes after removing the device. If the redness does not disappear, make an appointment to have this checked.

Diabetics and people with reduced skin sensation are especially vulnerable to skin irritation, particularly in bony areas such as the shin, or on the bottoms of the feet. Extra care should be taken and even minor skin irritations should be treated promptly.

## **Proper Hygiene**

It makes sense to keep both your orthosis and yourself as clean as possible. Any skin covered by the orthosis should be washed daily with warm water and mild soap. Generous rinsing ensures removal of all lather since dried soap irritates the skin. Thoroughly clean the bottoms of your feet and between the toes to eliminate bacteria and dirt. The skin should be completely dry before wearing an orthosis. Shaving your legs may cause an itchy rash or skin irritation.

Plastic AFOs should be cleaned regularly with rubbing alcohol or mild soap and water. Do not hasten drying by using a hair dryer or placing the orthosis in front of a heater. Your orthosis may be towel-dried or left to dry at room temperature. Talcum powder will also help prevent odors.

Maintenance of a metal orthosis includes regular wiping with a damp cloth to keep the leather clean, replacing the leather or Velcro as necessary, and oiling hinges. Metal parts may need to be reshaped periodically by the orthotist. A light, silicone spray will offer protection.

If any part of your brace cracks or breaks, including the fabric portions, make an appointment to bring it in for repair immediately.

## **Scheduled Visits**

You should schedule a follow-up visit now that you have received your orthosis. It is necessary to be seen to make sure the orthosis fits properly, is providing the required support, and that it doesn't cause an undue pressure or discomfort.

Future visits and orthotic maintenance checks may also be set at a schedule determined by your individual needs. Following this time frame will offer you peace of mind and guarantee that your orthosis is providing maximum support, comfort, and assistance.

## **Thank You**

We appreciate the confidence you have placed in us by selecting our services. Our team of skilled professionals is dedicated to providing you with the highest level of orthopedic care, and to designing the orthosis best suited to helping you attain the greatest degree of function. We trust you will be pleased with your orthosis. Following these suggestions should prevent you from having any issues, but if you have a concern, please call us.

## **Questions**

It is always best to contact your orthotist if questions arise about your orthosis. Our staff is ready to answer your questions and eager to fix any issues you may be having. We're here to give you the best possible care, so let us know how we can help.

Your orthotist is:

Jim P. Rogers, CPO, LPO

Phone Number:

(423) 648-4898

5959 Shallowford Road Suite 215 Chattanooga, TN 37421

Phone (423) 648-4898 • Fax (423) 499-4979