Health Facts for You

UWHealth

Using Your Carbon Fiber Ankle Foot Orthosis (AFO)

The carbon fiber AFO is an ankle brace made from carbon fiber materials that supports your ankle and foot. This brace can reduce pain, prevent further injury, promote healing and help you walk.

Wearing Your Carbon Fiber AFO
Your AFO should not hurt to wear, but it takes time to get used to. Slowly increase the amount of time you wear the brace. Wear a sock under the brace. The sock wicks sweat away from your skin and helps prevent rubbing. The sock should be snug so that there are no wrinkles. Check your skin often for sores. This is very important if you have partial or no feeling in your foot. It is especially important to check the skin around where the carbon fiber strut inserts onto the foot plate.

Schedule to break in your AFO:

- **Day 1:** 1-2 hours at a time and then take off and look for new redness. If redness goes away within 30 min, no issues.
- **Day 2:** 2-3 hours at a time, then check skin.
- **Day 3:** 3-4 hours, then check skin.
- **Day 4:** 4-6 hours, then check skin.
- **Day 5:** 7-8 hours, then check skin.
- After that, you can wear all day if there are no issues.

Use a mirror to see the bottom of your foot or the back of your leg. Report any red marks that don't start to fade after 30 minutes to your orthotist as soon as you can.

Finding the Right Shoe
Your shoe is part of the bracing system. A solid shoe will last longer and provide you with more strength. Select a lace-up, oxford style or an athletic shoe with the insert removed. The shoes often need to be at least a ½ size larger and wider than your normal size.

Putting on and Taking off Your AFO
To learn how to put on and take off your carbon fiber AFO, scan the QR code below or click here watch the video.

The AFO should be placed inside the shoe with the factory insert of the shoe on top of the foot section of the brace. Always make sure the carbon fiber foot plate is covered with a softer insert to protect the skin and make the brace more comfortable to wear.

Loosen the shoelaces or Velcro straps as wide as you can. Slide your foot into the AFO. Fasten the calf strap and any other straps. Tighten and fasten your shoe. You may have to use a shoehorn. Do not do squats with the brace on. If you're on the floor, remove the calf strap from the leg to help with getting up.

Tips

- Do not sleep in your AFO. Sleeping in your brace can cause sores (skin breakdown).
- Never wear the brace without a shoe or without a softer insert over top of the carbon fiber foot plate.
- Take the AFO out of the shoe often to look it over and check for any cracks or carbon fiber separation.

Cleaning Your AFO
Wipe off the brace as needed with a damp, soapy cloth or a cloth dampened with rubbing alcohol. Let the brace dry. The strap can also be hand washed with gentle soap or by spraying it with rubbing alcohol to disinfect. Let the straps air dry. The hook fastener will hold best if all the lint is removed (a dental pick or safety pin works well to lift lint up from Velcro).

When to Call
If have any concerns, please contact UW Health Orthotics or send a picture to your orthotist through Mychart.

Call your clinic if you have more numbness, tingling, pain or are less able to move or do your normal activities.

Who to Call
For adjustments or concerns about your AFO, please call the Orthotics Clinic.

East Madison Hospital Orthotics
4602 Eastpark Blvd.
Madison, WI 53718
(608) 440-6677 or (844) 607-4800

UW Health Orthotics Clinic
6220 University Ave.
Middleton, WI 53562
(608) 263-0583 or (877) 894-9940

University Rehab Clinic
6630 University Ave.
Middleton, WI 53562
(608) 263-8412 or (800) 323-8942

Your health care team may have given you this information as part of your care. If so, please use it and call if you have any questions. If this information was not given to you as part of your care, please check with your doctor. This is not medical advice. This is not to be used for diagnosis or treatment of any medical condition. Because each person's health needs are different, you should talk with your doctor or others on your health care team when using this information. If you have an emergency, please call 911. Copyright ©2/2026 University of Wisconsin Hospitals and Clinics Authority. All rights reserved. Produced by the Department of Nursing HF#8476.