

Children's Physiotherapy Service

Advice and care of your ankle foot orthosis (AFO)

General advice

Your child has been given a plastic AFO, specially made for them. Your therapist/orthotist will explain how to use it. You will need to put this on your child. Please make sure that all people involved in putting on the AFO are shown how to do this correctly.

An AFO must fit correctly and is usually individually made. As your child grows, adjustments may need to be made to it. New AFO's are made as assessed by your therapist.

Benefits of an AFO

Disorders that cause muscle imbalance e.g. cerebral palsy, spina bifida, muscular dystrophy etc., will cause joints to move or rest in wrong positions. These positions may become fixed. An AFO may help prevent this as: -

- It holds the foot in a corrected position
- It provides a stable base for standing and improves walking by helping the child obtain a heel strike and foot clearance.
- The prolonged gentle stretch of the calf muscle corrects toe walking and with correct everyday wear, can improve the muscles length and bulk.
- It helps correct further deformity. As your child grows, the muscle can tighten and muscle correction becomes difficult or impossible. The wearing of AFO can help prevent this.
- When an AFO is designed to be worn all day, it will not help correct muscle tightness if this is not followed.

What shoes can be worn?

You will be able to buy your own shoes to wear with the AFO and your therapist/orthotist will give you advice about the style. They do not need to be expensive and often a laced trainer is ideal. Ideally the footwear should lace well down the foot so that your child's toes can be checked to avoid curling. You may need to buy a larger size and width to fit over the AFO. Growing feet will need regular measuring to ensure the correct size footwear is being worn.

You should always ensure that your child is wearing the AFO when buying footwear or take it with you to put on when you are getting measured for new shoes.

When should it be worn?

An AFO can be a little uncomfortable at first, particularly if this is the first time your child is wearing one. To reduce discomfort it should be introduced gradually over one to two weeks, until it can be worn comfortably all day.

On the first day the AFO should be worn for a maximum of 30 minutes. The condition of the skin around the AFO should be checked regularly. The AFO and socks should be removed to check the

condition of the skin, and if any blisters or soreness are noted the therapist/orthotist needs to check the AFO. The orthotist may need to modify the splint.

Most AFO's are designed for all day use, but some are only to be worn at night. Your therapist will advise you as to when the AFO should be worn.

Care and cleaning

Check the AFO and your child's feet regularly for: -

- Skin soreness or very red marks
- If the splint is becoming too small – footplate too short or tight around the calf
- Padding or straps need replacement
- Loose rivets or screws

Please never try to make any repairs or adjustments to the AFO. This could be dangerous.

Contact the telephone number supplied immediately if any of above happen, or if you have any other concerns about the AFO.

The AFO is made of plastic and this may cause increased sweating of their leg and foot. Regular changes of socks and socks with a high natural fibre content e.g. cotton, will help reduce this.

Comfort may also be improved by: -

- Seamless socks, or worn inside out
- Avoiding lacy socks
- Avoiding embossed patterns on socks
- Avoiding socks being too small
- Avoiding thick socks

The plastic of the AFO can be wiped clean with a damp cloth. The straps can be washed with warm soapy water and towel dried.

Putting the AFO on and off

- If your child's foot is tight, move their foot up and down as shown by your therapist. This will help stretch the muscle and relax the ankle.
- Bend the knee. This relaxes the muscle and allows the foot to push up further (with the knee straight the ankle will seem tighter).
- Hold the foot with the toes/foot up and place the heel into the AFO.
- Fasten the ankle strap comfortably tight. Fasten all remaining straps.
- The toes may be gently lifted to observe the heel / check that it is sitting down on the foot plate of the AFO.
- Ensure the heel is correctly down in the splint at all times.
- When removing the AFO, move your child's foot as shown by your therapist/orthotist.
- Check their skin for soreness or very red marks.

School use

Many school policies dictate the type of shoes to be worn in school. It is advisable to speak to the teacher or head teacher to explain your child's individual circumstances. If necessary your therapist will be able to discuss the situation with the school.

Specific advice (if appropriate)

Review of AFO

- ☐ Parent/carer to contact number supplied if any concerned to arrange an appointment
- ☐ Therapist will review and advise

The orthotist who supplied you was

The therapist who supplied you was

Cost of orthosis and date issued

If they are lost or wilfully damaged you may be charged for the replacement
If you have any concerns about the AFO please contact the number below.

Please contact:

Community Paediatric Physiotherapy
Community Business Unit
Bensham Hospital
Gateshead
NE8 4YL

Telephone: 0191 445 3124

Data Protection

Any personal information is kept confidential. There may be occasions where your information needs to be shared with other care professionals to ensure you receive the best care possible.

In order to assist us to improve the services available, your information may be used for clinical audit, research, teaching and anonymised for National NHS Reviews and Statistics.

Further information is available via Gateshead Health NHS Foundation Trust website

(<https://www.gegateshead.nhs.uk/fairprocessing>) or by contacting the Data Protection Officer by telephone on 0191 445 8418 or by email ghnt.ig.team@nhs.net.

Information Leaflet: NolL347

Version: 3

Title: Children's Physiotherapy Service - Advice and care of your ankle foot orthosis (AFO)

First Published: June 2011

Review Date: August 2023

Author: Pam Dobinson, Childrens Physiotherapy Department

This leaflet can be made available in other languages and