

The Complete Guide to Custom Orthotics:

How You Tell If You Need Them

Dr. Rion Berg



I wrote this book because so many of my patients have had questions about orthotics. Like them you've likely encountered many different types and have wondered which ones are appropriate for you. I hope this book helps to dispel some of the common myths about orthotics and how you can be sure that you're getting the best solution for your foot condition.

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Introduction

If you're like most people, you're probably confused about the difference between the many types of orthotics and inserts on the market. And I'm not surprised. Orthotics or what are said to be orthotics have flooded the market, making it difficult for the average consumer to understand what they are buying.

As a podiatrist with over 40 years of experience, I've seen many orthotics and inserts come and go. Today I'd like to talk about why you may need orthotics and what's important to consider when obtaining them.

Why People Need Custom Orthotics

While it would be great if we were all born with perfect feet, most of us aren't. And even if we do have so-called normal arches, many of us have worn bad footwear and/or put our feet through a lot of abuse through sports or standing for long hours on hard surfaces.

Unfortunately, when we have flat feet, high arches, or feet that have been through the wringer they're more likely to cause us pain.

Some of the foot conditions that often require custom orthotics as part of treatment are:

- Plantar fasciitis
- Achilles tendonitis
- Morton's neuroma
- Bunions
- Hammertoe
- Ball of foot pain
- Flat feet
- Sports injuries
- Diabetic foot conditions



People with Flat Feet Often
Need Orthotics

What's the Difference Between Custom Orthotics and Other Orthotics or Inserts?

As I mentioned in the first paragraph, there are many different types of orthotics on the market. Will they all work to alleviate your pain and help with your foot condition? That's a big question and one that's not easily answered. That's because everyone's feet are different and the degree of foot pain and how you use your feet can vary widely.

For example, you may be experiencing heel pain. As your podiatrist, I'd want to know the following:

- Is it mild, moderate, or severe?
- Do you have flat feet, high arches, or normal arches?
- Are you fairly sedentary or are you an athlete or weekend warrior?

Without knowing the answers to these questions it's difficult to know what type of orthotic will work best for you.

Let's look at specific inserts or orthotics and how they work.

Over-the-Counter Insoles

As I mentioned the market is flooded with insoles that say they are orthotics, but really aren't. They may provide extra cushion for your feet, but they aren't providing any kind of support. Here's an example of that type of insole.



Medical Grade Orthotics

Another type of orthotic is medical grade orthotics. These orthotics aren't custom made but they can provide some support to your feet. However, because they aren't custom, they may not fit properly which can decrease how well they function.

These types of orthotics can work just fine for someone experiencing mild pain with their foot condition. However, many of my patients have already tried this type of orthotic but are still having pain. Keep in mind that these orthotics cannot properly align your feet, which is what's often needed to relieve your pain. These orthotics typically last for only 6 months.

I often provide this type of orthotic to my patients while they're waiting for their custom orthotics to come in. We carry Redithotics but also recommend Powerstep which can be purchased online.



Custom Molded Instant Orthotics

Sometimes my patients need more than just medical grade orthotics to tide them over until they get their custom orthotics. Or they're leaving on a trip and need a pair of instant orthotics that will help keep their foot pain at bay. In that case, I provide a Custom Molded Instant Orthotic called **Foot Balance**. These orthotics are just one step above the Medical Grade Orthotics because they are custom molded to your feet.

Traditional Custom Orthotics

Most of our patients require foot support and stability to resolve their pain and that means getting **custom orthotics**.

Custom orthotics provide the highest degree of support, controlling abnormal motion in the foot and helping with postural alignment. These orthotics offer the greatest potential for foot pain relief for those with heel pain, flat feet, and other foot pain problems. They are the longest-lasting types of orthotics, effective for 3-5 years, and are tailored specifically to your foot. They can provide dramatic relief from foot pain more quickly than you may have thought possible by:

- Increasing balance
- Increasing endurance



- Decreasing fatigue in your entire lower extremities
- Correct postural alignment that may diminish symptoms that extend to your back
- Increase performance in sports

All custom orthotics are made from a scan or impression of your feet. Traditional custom orthotics can be fashioned in many shapes and thicknesses with a variety of materials. For example, some heel pain patients may benefit from a functional orthotic comprised of a rigid shell with a thin, soft top cover. Many patients with rheumatoid arthritis find relief with a softer, accommodative orthotic that relieves pressure.

At our office, we can design and adjust traditional orthotics to meet your specific needs.

Many insurances cover custom orthotics.

3D-Printed Custom Orthotics

Another type of custom orthotic we offer to our patients is our 3D-Printed Custom Orthotic. This cutting-edge technology can rival traditional orthotics by giving you a level of precision and comfort that allows you to live an active and healthy lifestyle.



Unlike traditional custom orthotics, 3D-printed orthotics have a lattice design allowing for the perfect amount of stiffness and flexibility to support each part of the foot. Thin and lightweight, they are unmatched in the level of comfort they provide for sports, work, and daily activities.

Where more biomechanical control is needed, the 3D printer fills the lattice spaces of the orthotic without making it thicker or heavier. The thickness of the orthotic is easily adjusted to meet your individual needs using state-of-the-art 3D printing technology.

Our office uses an HP software laser scanner to capture a high-resolution, 3D-picture of the bottom of your foot and lower leg. We also use a special plate to obtain a standing and a dynamic view of your gait, so we can analyze your feet in motion.

Thousands of bits of data are used to create your unique 3D-printed orthotics. You'll be given a detailed review of the scan results to take with you.

Traditional Custom Orthotics vs. 3D-Printed Custom Orthotics

Depending on your needs we'll determine the right type of custom orthotic for you. Either way, we still use the gait analysis provided by the 3D scanner to assess your needs.

Typically, if you're going to need a lot of adjustments or different materials to make your orthotics comfortable, we'll recommend Traditional Custom Orthotics. Those who participate in athletics or have great differences between their feet will benefit greatly from the 3D Printed Custom Orthotics.

Little Steps for Children

Sometimes parents bring their young children to our office when they notice signs of developmental flatfoot such as frequent trips and falls or unusual walking patterns. Unlike other types of flat foot that kids grow out of, they won't grow out of this inherited pattern. Instead of casting the child with traditional orthotics, we use a custom-molded orthotic called Little Steps. These orthotics can be changed every year to accommodate the growing child.



Custom AFOs

Sometimes regular custom orthotics won't provide a patient with enough support. This often happens when there is a weakness in the tendons, muscles, or joints. In addition, some patients with neuropathy have trouble with balance. Then we use custom AFOs or an Ankle-Foot Orthotic. Here are some of the AFOs we use.

Arizona Brace

The Arizona Balance Brace (ABB) addresses muscle weakness and gait instability to help reduce risk of falling. This device is a custom-made foot orthosis often worn as a pair that is designed to fit easily into shoes.

Ritchie Brace

Another brace that addresses many of the same issues as the Arizona Brace is the Ritchie Brace. It provides patients with more mobility.

Moore Balance Brace

The final AFO we dispense is the Moore Balance Brace. This device helps our patients with neuropathy who are at risk of falling.



Interested in getting a new pair of custom orthotics today?
Call our office at 206-368-7000 or [request an appointment online](#).



Patient Testimonials

"I came in to see Dr. Berg because I had pain on the top of my left foot. He gave me orthotics and since then I have no pain when I play pickle ball."

-John T

"Saw Dr. Berg for what turned out to be "plantar fasciitis" on my left heel and a bunion on my right foot. He recommended orthotics before considering surgery. He explained clearly what the problems were, and how best to deal with them. Have been in the orthotics for one week now and the pain is lessening. His staff were good and his equipment impressive. I would recommend this doctor.

-Jim A.

"Right before I had to go to a trade show that involved miles of walking every day, Dr. Berg made orthotics that made such a difference. Instead of limping around for four days, I was able to enjoy the show and wear appropriately professional-looking shoes instead of the tennis shoes that I have had to resort to in the past. I have even been able to start walking with my husband again. Thanks Dr. Berg!"

-Jean M.