

Shoe Selection

Help Your Premium Orthotics With The Right Shoewear

Why Are Shoes Important If I Have Good Orthotics?

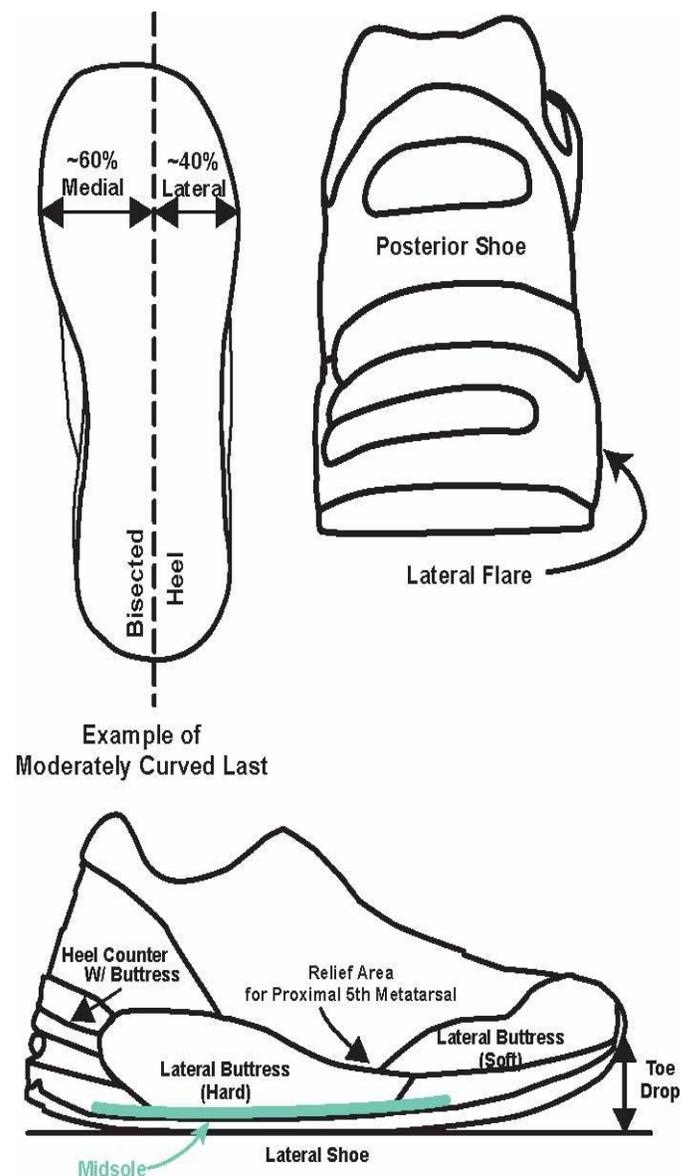
A shoe contains and positions the foot over the orthotic. A shoe with floppy construction may allow the foot to “spill” over the edges of the orthotic, reducing the corrective power of the orthotic. Most people buy their shoes based on current fashion trends and appearance rather than function. While looks are important, if you need orthotics to help your feet you should also give high priority to shoes that work with your orthotics to control foot function. This is especially true if you lead an active lifestyle. So in this document we will focus on the key things to consider when purchasing a new pair of shoes.

Insuring the Right Fit with Orthotics

Your foot plus the orthotics must have enough room for a comfortable yet snug fit. Any shoe that has a removable insole should be able to fit a standard full length orthotic. Many orthotics with a wide shell and/or a deep heel cup may fit well in the more casual type of shoe. Dress shoes, tight-fitting sports shoes and loafers (without a removable insole) will most likely require a dress type of orthotic with a narrow shell width and a shallow heel cup. High heel shoes (which we do not recommend) will take a dress-type design with a high heel modification (that bends the shell according to heel height).

What are the Key Features of Good Shoe Construction?

Different foot types need different features in a good shoe. Most people have a more flexible foot with arches that are too flat. That type of foot needs more motion control in the shoe design: a firm heel counter, a firm midsole and lateral buttress (see illustration). These features



add stiffness to the shoe and help keep your foot positioned correctly on top of your orthotics. A quick test for firm control when comparing different shoes is to squeeze the heel counter area together to see how easily it moves (the more firm the more motion control). Another is to hold the heel and forefoot areas of the shoe and twist: the harder the shoe is to twist the better the motion control.

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For more rigid, high-arched feet, the most important feature of the shoe will be shock absorption since this type of foot is relatively poor at shock absorption. Generally speaking, shoes with gel insets in the outsole have the best shock absorbing properties.

Other shoe design features that are important include a straight last, lateral flare and toe drop. A straight last means the sole of the shoe has minimal to no curvature when you look at the shoe upside down. Imagine a straight line bisecting (drawn lengthwise through the middle of) the heel carried forward through the forefoot area. A curved last has more forefoot area to one side of that line, typically a 60%/40% difference or more (see illustration on first page).

A “lateral flare” refers to the lateral side of the shoe being slightly extended to help deter lateral ankle sprains (the most common). This feature is most common on athletic shoes. The “toe drop” is designed to curve the front of the shoe upwards slightly to facilitate an easier roll forward off the toes during walking.

What About Dress Shoes, Loafers, High Heels and Other Shoes Without a Removable Insole?

With the exception of tight athletic shoes like those for soccer, skating and biking, most other shoes without a removable insole are designed for leisure -not prolonged weight-bearing activities. In those cases, shoes should be made well, the sturdier the construction the better, but the most important factor is a comfortable yet snug fit.

As we said earlier, a special dress-style orthotic must be made to fit shoes without a removable insole. Some very tight shoes might need to be custom fit (see your orthotic provider for more information).

As a rule of thumb, those people needing a lot of foot correction from an orthotic and those with deformities they are trying to correct with orthotic use should avoid anything but well-constructed, roomy casual shoes with all the features reviewed above. After all, your feet deserve the best possible vehicle for good foot function and feeling!



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