

AFO Decision Checklist

By the American Foot Drop Association (AFDA)

A plain-language roadmap for anyone newly prescribed an AFO (ankle-foot orthosis). No jargon. No guessing. Just the steps, questions, and red flags that help you walk out of your fitting confident and informed.

1. Who does what

Role	What they do	When you see them
Surgeon / Neurologist / Physiatrist	Diagnose foot drop and write the prescription for you	Early – after diagnosis or surgery
Orthotist	Custom-fits and builds the brace	Mid – after you get your prescription
Physical Therapist	Helps you learn how to walk safely and strengthen your muscles	After you get your brace fitting
Primary Care Doctor	Coordinates referrals and paperwork	As needed throughout

2. Before your appointment

Ask your doctor and insurance the right questions before the fitting. Gather key items and come prepared with shoes, imaging reports, and paperwork.

3. On fitting day

Wear pants that roll up. Bring your shoes and cane if you use one. Ask your orthotist to show you how to use and care for the brace. Walk around and speak up if it hurts or rubs.

4. Your break-in plan

Start with one hour on, one hour off. Increase daily until full-day wear. If redness lasts over 20 minutes, call your orthotist. Log your wear time and comfort notes.

5. Ten questions to ask your orthotist

- What type of AFO is this and why?
- Will it need adjustments after a few weeks?
- What socks and shoes are best?
- How do I clean it?
- What if I gain or lose weight — will it still fit?
- How long should it last?
- Can I drive with it on?
- How will I know if something is wrong?
- What's the process for getting repairs or replacements?

- Can I contact you directly for small fixes?

6. Red flags

Pain or skin breakdown lasting over 20 minutes, brace slipping, worsening limp, or being ignored by your orthotist are all signs to call for help.

7. Your follow-up plan

Re-check in 2–3 weeks, and re-fit every 6–12 months. Bring your brace to every PT and doctor visit.

8. Quick reminder

An AFO is a tool, not a sentence. Speak up early, learn comfort, and stay patient—most people need small tweaks before it feels right.

Need support?

Join the AFDA community for real talk, practical tips, and tools that help you feel steady again. Visit www.footdropassociation.org