AFO Fit and Decision Guide American Foot Drop Association (AFDA) A simple, clear starting point for anyone navigating their first AFO.

Introduction Beginning the AFO process can feel overwhelming. Most people with foot drop are given a prescription, handed a brace, and left to figure out the rest alone. No one explains the different brace styles, how each one works, what a proper fit should feel like, or what questions you should ask along the way. This combined guide brings everything into one place. It gives you a plain-language look at common AFO types, how to recognize a good fit, what to expect during the fitting process, practical break-in steps, red flags to watch for, and tips for buying or adjusting a brace. It is designed to help you walk into your appointments informed and walk out safer and more confident.

1. Common Types of AFOs Solid AFO: Maximum support with minimal ankle movement. Often used for severe weakness, spasticity, or significant instability. Posterior Leaf Spring (PLS): Lightweight and flexible. Helps clear the toes if you still have good knee control. Articulated or Hinged AFO: Has an ankle joint for controlled movement. Helpful for stairs, hills, and uneven ground. Carbon-Fiber Dynamic AFO: Light and springy with energy return. A good option for active walkers. Ground-Reaction AFO: Uses ground force to help stabilize the knee. Useful when the knee tends to buckle. Dorsiflexion-Assist AFO: Provides lift when some muscle strength remains. External Shoe-Mounted AFO: Attaches to the outside of your shoe, like TurboMed. Easier on skin and quick to switch between shoes. Night Splint: Worn during rest to prevent tightness. Not for walking.

2. How to Know if Your AFO Fits Correctly A proper fit should help you walk safely and comfortably. You should notice: • Your toes clear the ground with each step • Your heel strikes first without slapping • No rubbing, sores, or red spots that last more than twenty minutes • You can take the brace on and off without a struggle • Your knee stays steady, without buckling or snapping back • The brace works with shoes you actually wear

3. Before Your Fitting Appointment Bring these with you: • Shoes you plan to wear • Pants that roll up • Imaging or medical records (if you have them) • Your cane or walker if you use one

4. On Fitting Day • Speak up if anything feels tight, painful, or off • Ask to walk around the room and test different surfaces if possible • Have your orthotist show you how to put it on, care for it, and adjust straps • Do not leave with unanswered questions

5. Your Break-In Plan • Start with one hour on, one hour off • Increase wear time a little each day • Redness should fade within twenty minutes • If anything worsens, call your orthotist • Keep a simple log of comfort, pain, or changes

6. Ten Questions to Ask Your Orthotist 1. What type of AFO is this, and why was it chosen for me? 2. Will it need adjustments after a few weeks? 3. What socks and shoes work best with this device? 4. How do I clean and care for it? 5. Will it still fit if I gain or lose weight? 6. How long should it last? 7. Can I drive with it on? 8. How will I know if something is wrong? 9. What is the process for repairs or replacements? 10. Can I contact you directly for small fixes?

7. Red Flags • Pain or pressure that does not go away • Skin breakdown or bruising • The brace sliding, twisting, or moving • A worsening limp or new pain in your knee, hip, or back • Feeling dismissed or unheard during appointments

8. Quick Tips Before Buying Online Be cautious of: • Poor sizing and unclear descriptions • Braces that feel sharp, heavy, or stiff immediately • No clear return policy • No guidance on adjustments

Look for: • Carbon fiber or lightweight composite • Adjustable straps • Padding at major contact points

9. When to Get Extra Help Reach out to your orthotist or PT if: • Something hurts • Your walk feels unsafe • Your knee starts reacting differently • You feel unsure if the brace is right for you

Final Reminder An AFO is a tool to help you walk safely, not something you have to silently suffer through. Ask questions, speak up early, and give yourself time to adjust. You deserve comfort, clarity, and support every step of the way.