The Pedorthic Journey: Custom-made and Stock Orthopaedic Footwear

Custom-made orthopaedic footwear is typically used for the most serious or complex cases, when it will more effectively address the patient’s needs than stock orthopaedic footwear, a custom-made orthotic by itself, or footwear modifications. Custom-made orthopaedic footwear is made from raw materials and the end product can include other pedorthic devices such as orthotics and braces, as well as modifications. The fabrication of custom-made orthopaedic footwear is a highly technical endeavour. It involves making a “last,” which is a very precise model or mould of the foot and ankle structure built from a casting or a three-dimensional digitizing system to produce an accurate representation of the patient’s foot. The footwear is designed specifically to the needs of the individual patient then patterned, cut, and assembled over the last unique to the patient. It is the most complex and most costly pedorthic treatment solution. Stock orthopaedic footwear is the most frequently used footwear solution for pedorthic patients. While many features of stock orthopaedic footwear can be found in everyday shoes, there are two features that typically distinguish footwear as orthopaedic:

A. Extra depth in the shoe.

B. The shoe must be manufactured in at least three widths, with the tread surface widening incrementally when the upper widens.

Stock orthopaedic footwear is mass-produced, and is therefore not custom-made for an individual patient. Even if stock orthopaedic footwear is modified and a custom-made orthotic is inserted, the shoe itself can still not be classified as custom-made. Insurers are advised to pay special attention to this distinction in reviewing claims.

A note on language: The term “orthotic shoe” is often used, but the term has no clinical significance. The term is often intended to describe the shoe into which an orthotic has been placed. The shoe itself, however, is not different from any other footwear that is available in the market.

Our Position

Canadian Certified Pedorthists are specially trained and qualified to produce lasts and to design custom-made orthopaedic shoes. The term “custom-made orthopaedic shoes” only applies to footwear made from raw materials on a last unique to the patient. Retail or stock footwear is not custom made. Modifying a retail shoe or adding a custom-made orthotic does not reclassify the end product as a custom-made shoe. Footwear and modifications to footwear are two separate matters and should be clearly itemized in billing. If a stock orthopaedic shoe is used, its brand and style should be itemized to confirm that it is indeed an orthopaedic shoe.

About PAC

The Pedorthic Association of Canada (PAC) is a national, non-profit organization whose main mandate is to develop and promote the study, practice, and knowledge of Pedorthics in Canada. The Pedorthic Association of Canada was established in 1990. Under the guidance of the Association, the Pedorthic profession in Canada has grown significantly.

PAC boasts a membership of more than 600 pedorthists nationwide, bound by the strict Code of Ethics of the Association and The College of Pedorthics of Canada.

For further information about the Pedorthic Association of Canada, please contact the office at 1-888-268-4404 or info@pedorthic.ca.
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