

Insoles for people living with a rheumatic condition

Insoles – what are they, when should I use one and how should I choose?

Summary:

Insoles, sometimes referred to as an orthotic or orthoses, are inserts that you wear inside your shoes. There are different types of insoles. Some are soft and designed to provide you with comfort. Some are firmer and designed to provide your foot with support.

Podiatrists can design a specific insole prescription that will meet your foot health needs. However, for some people are not able to access a Podiatrist or may prefer to try an insole that you can buy in the first instance. You can also buy insoles in a range of shops.

This guide is designed to provide information about insoles including when they may be useful, how they work, and how you can use them. It is advised that you contact a Podiatrist for advice about insoles if possible.

What are insoles?

Insoles, sometimes referred to as orthotics or orthoses, are inserts that you wear inside your shoes. There are different types of insoles. Some are soft and designed to provide you with comfort. Some are firmer and designed to provide your foot with support.

Some insoles can change the way that your feet, knees, or hips move when you are walking. By supporting the way that you move, insoles can help to reduce joint or muscle pain and reduce the symptoms of arthritis. It is important to note that in the same way, using the wrong insole for you, could make your arthritis symptoms worse or cause a new injury. To reduce the risk of possible harm to you caused by using the wrong type of insole for you, it is recommended that you get advice from a Podiatrist before using an insole if possible.

What type of insoles should I use?

There is no exact answer to this question. A Podiatrist is the best person to advise you about what insole is correct for you. However, you are the best person to decide how your foot feels and what type of insole you can wear comfortably. As a general guide there are two main types of insoles that

you, ideally with the help of a Podiatrist, could choose from:

1. Cushioned insoles – these are usually flatter and made of soft materials.
2. Firmer insoles – these are usually shaped to contact the arch of the foot.

Some people find good benefit from an insole that is softer and also has a raised arch area. A Podiatrist will be able to give you more advice about your insole prescription needs.

Should I wear insoles?

Not everyone with arthritis needs to wear insoles. There are times when insoles may be useful. You may want to consider the following questions:

- Are you experiencing aching in your feet at the end of the day? – cushioned insoles may help.
- Are you experiencing pain when you walk a lot or do activity? – firmer insoles used with a shoe that has a cushioned sole (for example a trainer) may help.
- Are you experiencing a flare in your arthritis? – cushioned insoles may help but you should get advice from a Podiatrist if possible.
- Have you got a new injury to your foot or ankle? – firmer insoles may help support the foot and enable tissues to heal.
- Are you noticing that your foot is starting to roll inwards? – firmer insoles may help to support the foot structure.

Do I need to wear my insoles all the time?

No, unless told to do so by your Podiatrist. Most people benefit from using insoles whilst completing their daily routines. If you choose to use insoles to help recover from an injury you may find it useful to wear it continuously for a few months, but you can reduce your use after this. A Podiatrist will be able to provide more advice.

If you are planning on doing more activity than normal you may find wearing your insole helpful.

Sometimes a Podiatrist might advise that you wear insoles for a long time. This advice is normally given for a

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specific reason. Other times you will be advised to reduce wearing them if your condition improves.

Can I start using my insoles straight away?

If you are new to wearing insoles you should think about slowly getting used to them. You could start by wearing the insoles for 1 hour on day 1, 2 hours on day 2, 3 hours on day 3 etc. Some people who are new to wearing insoles can get more pain in their foot or leg joints if they wear insoles for too long at one time. It can take time for your joints and muscles to adapt to wearing insoles. If you have more pain when wearing insoles, you should stop using them straight away. If you have had continued or more pain when trying insoles that you have bought you should get advice from a Podiatrist.

What if my shoes do not fit with my insoles in?

Wearing insoles can mean that your feet do not fit inside your shoes in the same way. In the first instance you can often remove the shoes' original liner and replace this with your new insoles. This will increase the room inside your shoes and make your new insoles more comfortable.

Some shoes work better with insoles than others; for example, lace-up shoes work better than slip-on shoes and flat shoes work better than high-heels. Velcro fastening shoes are a good choice if you have arthritis in your hands and cannot do up shoelaces easily.

You may find it useful to buy shoes in a slightly larger size to help improve the fit of the shoes when you are wearing insoles. It is useful to take your insoles with you when buying new shoes. It is helpful to buy new shoes in the afternoon because your feet may swell throughout the day. It is fine to test the fit of new shoes with your insoles in the shop before you buy them. Most shops will have a sales assistant that will help you to move the insoles in and out of the shoes and get the shoes on and off if this is something that you find difficult.

If your insoles cause your shoes to rub your skin, or increase pain in your joints, remove them and contact your podiatrist.

Where can I get insoles from?

There are a range of insoles available from high street shops or online retailers. Some NHS services provide insoles via the Podiatry department. Some private Podiatrists can prescribe and make insoles.

Where can I get help if I am still unsure about using insoles?

If you are still unsure about using insoles you can access additional help by:

- Contacting your local Podiatrist, or
- Contacting your GP, or
- Contacting a member of your rheumatology healthcare team.

Key facts:

- Whenever possible you should get advice from a podiatrist before using an insole.
- Insoles can be soft to cushion the foot or firm to support the foot.
- You might choose a different type of insole if you are experiencing a disease flare.
- You should seek Podiatrist advice if:
 - o You notice your foot changing shape.
 - o You have continuous or severe foot pain when standing or walking.