

# Braces for ALS

When muscles weaken, people living with ALS may find it harder to hold their head up, raise their arms, or lift their feet. Without additional support, muscles can stiffen and daily activities can become more difficult and painful.

Braces, also known as orthoses, can help you stay safe, have more energy, and experience less pain and discomfort. If you notice that it is getting more challenging, or taking more effort, to walk or do other daily activities, contact your ALS clinic or neurologist to ask about braces and other interventions.

These are the three most common types of braces recommended for ALS:

## Neck Braces

A neck brace, or cervical collar, can help support your neck and head if your muscles are weakened. There are many different types of neck braces. They come in different sizes and can be adjusted.



## Hand and Wrist Braces

Hand and wrist braces can help stabilize your wrist so you can use your fingers to do things like type, text, write, eat, and grasp. Resting hand splints hold your wrist, hand, and fingers in a neutral position to prevent them from contracting. Finger splints can help align and stabilize the middle joints of your fingers.



## Ankle Foot Braces (AFOs)

An ankle foot brace, often referred to as an AFO, can help you walk with greater stability, efficiency, and safety. An AFO helps lift your foot to clear the ground and land back on your heel.



It can be hard to accept that you may need additional support, and adjusting to wearing braces can be challenging. But getting the brace you need—sooner rather than later—can increase your energy level, help you remain more independent, help keep you safe, and improve your overall quality of life.

## How can I get braces?

If you are experiencing muscle weakness that is making it harder to walk, hold your head up, or do daily activities with your hands, tell your physical and occupational therapists during your next ALS clinic visit.

Your therapists will document your need for braces and will either give you a brace or suggest you go to a local orthotist to get fitted for one. If you want to get your braces paid for by insurance, you will need a prescription from your neurologist. If you do not live near or attend an ALS clinic, start with your local ALS neurologist. Keep in mind that Medicare will only pay for one type of brace for the same body part once every five years.

## Can I buy braces online or in a store?

You can find many braces online and in stores, and there is a chance you will find one that works well for you. However, we recommend starting with your local medical team.

There is no substitute for experienced professionals who can assess your individual needs, prescribe the right style of brace for you, and answer your questions. An orthotist or physical or occupational therapist who has worked with ALS patients will know what types of braces work best for the needs and progression of this disease. This professional will be able to fit you and make adjustments during and after your visit. When you get a prescription, the order will be processed through your insurance.

There may be some helpful, less expensive braces or pillows that you can purchase online or in a store. Keep in mind that insurance will probably not cover these purchases. If you feel you need a brace before you can see your neurologist, you can try buying the brace yourself.

### Get Local Support



**ALS United North Carolina**  
**4 N. Blount Street - Suite 200**  
**Raleigh, NC 27601**  
[www.alsnc.org](http://www.alsnc.org)  
**(919) 755-9001**

### Learn More

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[www.youralsguide.com/braces](http://www.youralsguide.com/braces)

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