

# The Upside & Hidden Danger of Using AFOs for Foot Drop After Stroke

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If you suffer from [foot drop after stroke](#), then your therapist will likely recommend an ankle foot orthosis (AFO).

The purpose of the AFO is to ensure your safety by preventing your foot from dragging on the floor. This is very important.

The problem with AFOs, however, is that they often lead to [learned-nonuse](#), a condition where your brain completely forgets how to use your neglected muscles.

Now, why would your therapist recommend something that could cause you to completely lose control of your foot?

## The Upside: Your Safety!

AFO's are absolutely essential if you have foot drop. They help you move safely and prevent falls after stroke. Although there are consequences to using an AFO, you should absolutely use them if your therapist recommends it! Seriously. Do not stop wearing your AFO cold turkey. We will discuss a safe way to wean yourself off later.

But first, let's discuss why you may want to consider weaning yourself off that AFO...

## The Danger: AFOs Prevent You from Getting Better

AFOs are like a crutch. They're useful while you're healing, but you'll need to push yourself past the crutch at some point if you want to [achieve a full recovery](#).

Stroke patients who use AFOs for too long can end up with learned nonuse and completely lose the use of their foot. But if you challenge yourself to regain use of your foot, then you can outgrow the need for an AFO.

## How to Naturally Regain the Use of Your Foot

In order to regain the use of your foot, you need to reconnect your mind to your muscles through neuroplasticity. [Neuroplasticity](#) is the mechanism that rewires your brain, and you can activate it through [repetitive practice](#).

By repeating [foot drop exercises](#) over and over, neuroplasticity will start to engage and your brain will get better and better at controlling your foot. Over time, your foot mobility will gradually improve from all your hard work.

## Should You Use an AFO or Not?

So, what should you do? Should you keep the AFO or kick it to the curb?

Our advice is to continue to use your AFO because it's important for your safety and wellbeing. But don't stop there.

We also encourage you to start practicing foot drop exercises on a regular basis (preferably with a [full-body rehabilitation regimen](#)). This will prevent your brain from completely forgetting how to use your foot, and it will help you slowly start to outgrow the need for an AFO.

As you put in the hard work and move those muscles, you might be able to graduate to smaller and smaller AFOs. Until one day, you don't need an AFO at all.