

Foot Drop Exercises for Stroke Patients

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Update: We published more foot drop exercises with pictures on 2/3/2017. If you're a visual learner, check them out! They could be a great addition to the foot drop exercises below.

What Is Foot Drop?

Foot drop involves difficulty lifting the front part of your foot, making it difficult to walk properly. Foot drop should be treated to ensure safety and reduce your risk of falling.

To learn more about foot drop and other treatment options, refer to our article done on 9/15/2015.

1. Toe-Heel Rocks

Stand in front of a table or counter, using it for support. Then, rock your weight forward onto your toes, lifting your heels off the ground, and then backward onto your heels, lifting your toes off the ground.

If you can't lift your toes off the ground, even attempting will still send signals to your brain and help rewire those function. With enough practice and repetition, you can regain the ability to lift the front part of your foot again.

2. Foot Stretch

From a seated position with your leg out in front of you, take a towel or resistance band and wrap it around your foot. Then, gently stretch your foot backwards towards your torso.

3. Ball Lift

Take a seat and place a lacrosse ball or other smallish object on the ground in front of you. Then, use your feet to lift the ball off the ground by extending your legs. Bring the ball to knee-height while keeping your feet in dorsiflexion. Hold for 5 seconds, then release and repeat 10 times.

4. Dynamic Dorsiflexion

Dorsiflexion refers to backward flexion of the hand or foot.

From a seated position, lift your right leg up so that it's parallel in front of you. Then, curl your toes in so that they're pointing toward your torso (dorsiflexion). Hold for 5 seconds and release. Do 15-20 repetitions.

5. Isometric Dorsiflexion

Isometric exercises don't require movement. Instead, your muscles remain contracted in the same position while overcoming resistance.

For this exercise, take a resistance band and hook one end to something extremely sturdy, like the leg of a table. Then, hook the other end over the top part of your foot and flex your toes backwards toward your torso (dorsiflexion). Hold this position for 5 seconds and release. Do 10 repetitions.

6. PNF Patterns

PNF refers to Proprioceptive Neuromuscular Facilitation. For this exercise, think 'up and over.'

From a seated position, lift your leg up as if you're going to cross your legs, but stop halfway. Be sure to:

- Lift your leg as high as you can
- Keep your knee bent at 90 degrees
- Engage your foot in dorsiflexion

To get the most out of this exercise, try to draw your foot as close to your midline – or past it – as possible. Hold your leg at the highest position for 5 seconds, and release. Try 10 repetitions.

7. Gym Exercises

If you have access to a gym, you can try using the stationary bike and calf raise machine to strengthen and retrain the muscles necessary for proper gait.