

Foot Drop Exercises for At-Home Physical Therapy

The following foot drop exercises feature physical therapist Liliana, DPT. She's the same therapist that guides our [leg exercises on YouTube](#).

Liliana has experience helping patients with foot drop regain mobility using these exact exercises. Here are some of her best physical therapy exercises for foot drop, organized from easiest to hardest:

1. Ankle Dorsiflexion



Start this passive foot drop exercise with your affected leg still crossed over your other leg. Then, use your non-affected arm to move your foot into dorsiflexion. This is the exact movement that people with foot drop struggle with, so this exercise is a perfect starting point.

This is a [passive movement](#), which is a great starting point for anyone struggling with extremely limited mobility. It will also help reduce the chances of your foot and ankle muscles becoming stiff from lack of movement.

2. Ankle Adduction/Abduction



For another great passive foot drop exercise, cross your affected leg over your other leg. Then, use your non-affected hand to move the toe part of your foot up and down. (The foot will be moving side to side along the ankle with the bottom of your foot staying perpendicular to the floor.) Focus on initiating all the movement from your ankle.

Passive exercises are great for patients with severely limited mobility. If you already have some movement, then add some challenge by doing the exercise without assistance from your hand (i.e. “active exercise”).

3. Assisted Toe Raises



Toe raises are the most difficult movement to perform with foot drop. If you have difficulty with this movement — that's okay! Fortunately, this is another passive exercise that you can use to help spark neuroplasticity and rewire the brain.

Start by placing your affected foot on top of your non-affected foot. Then, use your non-affected foot to lift your foot up. Use slow, intentional movements to help stimulate the brain.

Lift your foot up and down during this exercise a total of 10 times or more.

4. Toe Raise “Negatives”

A “negative” exercise involves emphasizing the *eccentric* part of a movement. With the previous Toe Raise exercise, the eccentric part of the movement is lowering your foot back down.

During this exercise, we will emphasize only the eccentric part of the movement.

Start by lifting your affected foot up into a flexed position (toes towards your shin), just like in the Toe Raise exercise. But this time, instead of dropping your foot back down quickly, try to lower your foot as slowly as you can.

This move is more advanced, because it does require some control of your foot. Try doing this a total of 10 times before moving onto the next foot drop exercise.

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5. Heel Raises



This active foot drop exercise is the opposite of toe raises. Although this may not feel like it's helping with foot drop, it will help train the surrounding muscles.

To perform heel raises, start with your feet flat on the ground. Then, point your toes and lift your heels off the ground. Repeat 10 times.

6. Ankle Eversion



For this **active** foot drop exercise, place your affected foot flat on the ground. Then, lift the outside edge of your foot and toes up, then relax back down.

Focus on initiating the movement from your foot and ankle and try to avoid making the movement with your leg. Repeat 10 times.

7. Ankle Inversion

For ankle *inversion*, start in the same position but move the inside edge of your foot and toes up towards the midline of your body, then relax back down.

8. Single Leg Stands

Standing on one foot is another great way to exercise ankle eversion and challenge your ankle stability in general.

Patients with foot drop who have enough strength and balance can try to stand on their affected leg for 15 seconds at a time. Be sure to hold onto the back of a chair for stability so that you don't fall. The risk of falling is greater in patients with foot drop, so don't skip this step.

9. Hip Adduction and Abduction



Although this exercise targets the leg, it's also helpful for foot drop because increased tone (stiffness) in the leg can also affect the foot.

Start this lower limb exercise in a seated position. Then, kick your affected leg inward toward your midline (hip adduction). Then, kick your affected leg outward (hip abduction), like you're kicking a ball to the side. Repeat back and forth.

This exercise helps with foot drop because improving mobility in the leg has a trickle-down effect into the feet.

10. Hip Rotation



To finish up these foot drop exercises, try this gross motor exercise for the lower limbs.

In a seated position, start with a towel underneath your affected foot. Then, use your arm to assist your affected leg and slide your leg and toes towards your midline (internal rotation). Then, push your leg and slide your leg and toes outwards (external rotation).

These last two foot drop exercises target the legs, which can be helpful for patients with severe foot drop when it's coupled with other lower limb impairments.