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Foot Drop Options

By Julie Stevens-Hom, MPT, NCS

What does it mean to have foot drop? When the muscles of the lower leg are weakened and unable to repeatedly lift the foot throughout the walking cycle, the toes can easily catch on the floor. Foot drop is a serious condition that often contributes to difficulty walking and can cause many falls. There are multiple conditions that can cause foot drop which can include stroke, brain injury, and multiple sclerosis.

Foot drop can be addressed in several ways:

1. **Physical therapy** is important to improve the strength, flexibility, coordination, and endurance of the muscles responsible for lifting the foot.
2. **Bracing**: There are several styles of an Ankle-Foot Orthosis (AFO) that assists with holding the foot in the right position.
3. **Electrical Stimulation**: There are two wireless functional electrical stimulation units on the market right now – the Bioness L300 and the Walkaide. Electrodes are placed over the muscles responsible for lifting the foot and assist with consistency while walking.

In summary, it is important to address deficits with walking such as foot drop to prevent falls, improve energy conservation, and increase the ease of mobility. A physical therapist who specializes in the treatment of neurological diagnoses such as stroke and brain injury can assist in your recovery and decisions in treatment for foot drop.

Julie Hom, MPT, NCS is the owner of Ability Rehabilitation Specialists, a highly specialized outpatient physical and occupational therapy clinic. They offer the Movement Recovery Program for Stroke and Brain Injury survivors that is covered by most insurances. They also offer group balance classes on Tuesday evenings. To find out more, call (858)456-2114 or log onto www.physicaltherapysandiego.com.