

Hip Fracture Recovery

What You Need to Know

What Is a Hip Fracture?

A hip fracture is a break in the upper portion of the femur (thigh bone) near the hip joint. It is most commonly caused by a fall, particularly in older adults with osteoporosis where the bones have become fragile. Hip fractures are serious injuries that require prompt surgical treatment in nearly all cases and a dedicated rehabilitation program to regain walking ability and independence.

There are two primary types: femoral neck fractures (within the joint capsule) and intertrochanteric fractures (just below the joint). The type influences which surgical procedure is used — either fixation with screws and plates, or replacement of the femoral head with a prosthetic (hemi or total hip replacement).

What Can I Expect After Surgery?

Days 1–3: Acute hospital phase

- Walking with a walker begins the day of or day after surgery — this is critical
- Physical therapy starts immediately in the hospital
- Blood clot prevention is a top priority

Weeks 1–4: Early rehabilitation

- Walking with a walker, gradually building distance and independence
- Outpatient or home PT for range of motion and strengthening
- Weight-bearing status depends on fracture type and fixation — follow surgeon's instructions precisely

Weeks 4–12: Progressive strengthening

- Transition from walker to cane as strength and balance improve
- Hip, knee, and core strengthening
- Balance training to reduce fall risk — critical for preventing a second fracture

Months 3–6+: Return to independence

- Most patients regain independent walking and basic daily activities

- Fall prevention strategies are an essential part of long-term care

When Should I Be Concerned?

- Signs of blood clot: calf pain, swelling, or shortness of breath — seek emergency care
- Signs of infection: fever, increasing redness or discharge at the surgical site
- A sudden increase in hip pain after a fall — possible implant failure or re-fracture
- Inability to bear weight that was previously possible — contact your surgeon

How Physical Therapy Changes the Outcome

Research is unequivocal: early, consistent physical therapy after hip fracture significantly reduces complications, shortens recovery time, and dramatically improves the likelihood of returning home and regaining independence. Balance training — an essential component of PT — is the most powerful tool for preventing a second fracture.

With dedicated physical therapy, most patients regain functional independence within **3 to 6 months** following hip fracture surgery.

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