

My Foot Drags or Slaps When I Walk

Understanding Foot Drop

What Is Causing Foot Drop?

Foot drop is weakness or paralysis of the muscles that lift the front of the foot, most often from compression or damage to the peroneal (fibular) nerve, but it can also stem from spinal, nerve, or neurological conditions.

What Does It Feel Like?

- Difficulty lifting the front of the foot while walking
- The foot slapping down or dragging with each step
- Tripping over your own toes
- A high-stepping walking pattern to compensate and clear the foot
- Numbness on the top of the foot or outer shin

What Causes It?

- Peroneal nerve compression — from crossing the legs, prolonged kneeling or squatting, or a tight cast
- Lumbar spine issues such as a disc herniation or spinal stenosis
- Stroke or other neurological conditions like multiple sclerosis
- Diabetes
- Complications following hip or knee surgery
- Direct trauma to the outer knee, where the nerve is most exposed

What Makes It Worse?

- Prolonged sitting with legs crossed
- Activities that compress the outer knee or fibular head
- Walking without a brace or assistive device when one is needed
- Ignoring early numbness or tingling

When Should I Be Concerned?

- Rapidly worsening weakness
- Loss of bladder or bowel control (possible spinal cord involvement) — seek immediate care
- Foot drop following a fall or trauma
- Numbness spreading further up the leg

The Good News

Physical therapy plays a central role in managing foot drop — gait training, an ankle-foot orthosis if needed, and targeted strengthening or neuromuscular re-education can significantly improve walking safety and function.

Recovery varies widely by cause; nerve-related foot drop often improves over **6 weeks to 6 months**, while some underlying causes require longer-term management.

This information is for general educational purposes only and is not a substitute for a professional evaluation. Call us today — we have immediate openings with no waitlist.

Call (781) 769-2040 | Book online at www.ptandsr.com