

Physical Therapy Following the Application of an External Fixator



Shriners Hospitals
for Children®—St. Louis

What is Physical Therapy and why do I need it?

Initially after surgery, you may feel afraid to move your leg, and will probably have some difficulty standing and walking. Your physical therapist will help you get comfortable and moving again. As you start your lengthening or correction through your External Fixator, your muscles will tighten and weaken somewhat. This is to be expected. The goals of Physical Therapy are to help keep your muscles flexible and strong, and to help you stay as active as possible throughout your External Fixator process.

When do I start?

Physical Therapy will begin the day after surgery. You will attend PT in our Rehab Dept. **twice each weekday, once on Saturday, and once on Sunday.** Your PT will provide you with an exercise program that you and your parent/caretaker will perform in your room on Sat and Sun afternoon. Most patients are able to go home the Monday following surgery, after the morning PT session.

No way, I can NOT do this!

At first, you may need help moving your leg in bed, standing, and taking a few steps with a walker or crutches. You will likely require a wheelchair to get to PT. This is perfectly normal and you will work to regain your independence with PT! Most patients are up and walking with a walker or crutches by the time they leave the hospital, using a wheelchair only for long distances outside of the home.

Ok, maybe I can. But HOW?

While in PT, you will work on strengthening and stretching exercises and practice moving in bed, standing, and walking. Your PT will provide an exercise program designed specifically for you and will make recommendations on the best assistive device for you. (Walker, crutches, cane.) If able, your therapist will teach you how to walk up and down a small flight of stairs in the PT dept as well. Things may go slowly the first day or two, but it **will** get easier!

Where to Call with Questions or Concerns

Tracy Przybylski, PT
Physical Therapist

Limb Reconstruction & Lengthening
314-432-3600, ext. 1138

Jill Hahn, Clinical Coordinator

Limb Reconstruction & Lengthening
314-692-6443

Who can come with me?

Your parent/caretaker will be encouraged to attend and participate during physical therapy sessions in order to learn how to assist you with your exercise program and mobility once you go home. On occasion, parents may be asked to step out during a particular session if it is felt you will have a more positive rehab experience on your own.



Yay! It's time to go home!

Before you leave the hospital, your PT will ask your parent/caregiver to demonstrate that they are comfortable assisting you with your **home exercise program (HEP)**, application of your foot strap or ankle brace, and supervising you while walking. You will be given a written copy of your HEP, including your therapist's contact information in case you have any questions after you leave. **It is very important that you continue to perform your HEP twice every day** (once on days you attend Outpatient PT) **and follow all therapy instructions!**

Prior to leaving the hospital, you will be required to have appointments scheduled for **Outpatient Physical Therapy, 3 visits per week, beginning the week you return home.** If you live close to the hospital, you will attend PT in our Rehab Dept, as you did after surgery. If you live further away, you may attend with your choice of PT, closer to your home. We will contact your Outpatient PT to discuss your therapy goals and treatment plan prior to your first visit with him/her.

Keep working on your HEP... every single day! It is so very important that you continue to stretch, strengthen, and walk on your Ex-Fix, in order for your leg to lengthen and heal properly. Failure to follow instructions may result in excessive joint stiffness or delayed bone healing, causing a delay in lengthening and **longer time in your Ex-Fix!** Please call our PT dept right away if you have any concerns about your progress!

For more information on our Limb Length Discrepancy services, visit <http://stlshrinerslimbreconstruction.com>