



Life After PAO: Recovery, Physical Therapy, and FAQs

Periacetabular Osteotomy (PAO) is a major surgery that requires a significant recovery period. After leaving the hospital, your at-home recovery and physical therapy will be critical to achieving a successful outcome. This guide will walk you through the recovery process, physical therapy milestones, and common questions to help you feel prepared for the journey ahead.

At-Home Recovery: What to Expect

Your recovery at home after PAO surgery will involve managing your incision, following physical therapy instructions, and gradually returning to normal activities. Here's what you need to know:

Dressing and Incision Care

Your surgical incision will be covered with a sterile bandage when you leave the hospital. Keeping the incision clean and dry is essential to prevent infection and promote healing.

- **Daily Monitoring:** Check the incision site daily for signs of redness, drainage, or swelling. If you notice any unusual discharge, increased pain, or a fever over 101°F, contact your doctor immediately.
- **Bandage Changes:** Your doctor will instruct you on when and how to change your bandage. Be gentle and avoid scrubbing the area. You should also avoid soaking the incision (such as in a bath or swimming pool) until your surgeon clears you, typically after 6 weeks.



- **Sutures or Staples:** Most patients will have dissolvable sutures, but if staples are used, they will need to be removed during a follow-up visit. Keep the area dry until cleared by your surgeon.
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Physical Therapy

Physical therapy (PT) is a critical part of your recovery after PAO surgery. It begins soon after surgery and will continue for several months to help restore mobility, strength, and function to your hip.

- **Initial Physical Therapy:** Your first few physical therapy sessions will focus on passive range-of-motion (ROM) exercises. These exercises are designed to gently move your hip without using your own muscles, preventing stiffness and maintaining flexibility in the joint.
- **Progressive PT:** As your healing progresses, your physical therapist will introduce more active exercises aimed at rebuilding strength and improving balance.
- **Pool Therapy:** If available, pool therapy can be beneficial during the early stages of recovery. The water provides support and reduces pressure on your hip while allowing you to move more freely.

Weight Bearing

Weight-bearing restrictions are a critical part of your recovery. Initially, you will be limited to 1/6 of your body weight on the affected leg. This means you'll need to use crutches or a walker for support.

- **Using Assistive Devices:** Your physical therapist will teach you how to properly use crutches or a walker to prevent placing too much weight on your hip. You'll need to follow these instructions closely for the first 6-8 weeks.
- **Gradual Weight-Bearing:** After 6-8 weeks, as the bones begin to heal, your surgeon will allow you to gradually increase weight-bearing, but this will be closely monitored through X-rays and follow-up visits.



- **Crutch Weaning:** Many patients transition off crutches by the 3-month mark, but some may need longer depending on the speed of their recovery and individual healing.
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Physical Therapy Milestones

Your physical therapy plan will be customized based on your progress, but here are some general milestones to guide you through the process:

Weeks 1-6: Passive Movements and Mobility

- **Focus:** The first phase of recovery focuses on gentle passive movement to maintain flexibility in your hip joint without putting any strain on the healing bones.
- **Exercise Restrictions:** No hip flexion beyond 90 degrees is allowed during this time. Avoid activities that require you to bend or lift your leg.
- **Crutches:** You'll rely heavily on crutches or a walker for support, keeping most of your weight off the operated leg.

Weeks 6-12: Strengthening and Weight-Bearing

- **Gradual Weight-Bearing:** Around 6-8 weeks, your surgeon will likely allow you to start putting more weight on your leg. This process is gradual, and weight-bearing will be closely monitored by your physical therapist and surgeon.
- **Strengthening Exercises:** Physical therapy will start to include strengthening exercises for your hip, leg, and core muscles. This may include exercises like leg lifts, bridges, and stationary cycling with no resistance.
- **Pool Therapy:** If available, pool therapy can be introduced to help support your movements while reducing the impact on your joints.

Months 3-5: Intensive Weight-Bearing and Mobility



- **Increased Mobility:** At this stage, you'll begin intensive weight-bearing exercises to help you regain full mobility and strength in your hip.
- **Functional Training:** Your physical therapist will work on functional movements like walking, climbing stairs, and balancing exercises to help you transition back to normal activities.
- **Weaning Off Crutches:** By the end of this period, many patients are ready to stop using crutches altogether, although some may still need them for longer distances or uneven terrain.

Month 6 and Beyond: Returning to Normal Activities

- **Full Weight-Bearing:** By 6 months, most patients are able to bear full weight on the operated leg without crutches.
 - **Return to Sports:** Many patients can return to light sports and physical activities at this stage, but higher-impact activities like running, soccer, or tennis should be approached with caution and only after clearance from your surgeon.
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Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

1. When can I drive?

You can usually resume driving 6-8 weeks after surgery, but there are a few conditions:

- You must be off narcotic pain medications.
- You should feel confident in your ability to perform emergency stops and control the car without discomfort.
- Start by practicing in an empty parking lot or low-traffic area before returning to regular driving.

2. How long until I return to work?

The timing of your return to work depends on the type of job you have:



- **Desk Jobs:** Most patients with sedentary jobs can return to work within 4-6 weeks, although you may need to make arrangements to elevate your leg or take breaks for walking to avoid stiffness.
- **Physically Demanding Jobs:** If your job involves standing, walking, lifting, or manual labor, you may need up to 3 months or longer to fully recover before returning.

3. Will I need more surgery in the future?

In some cases, additional surgery may be required after PAO:

- **Screw Removal:** The screws used to stabilize your hip may cause discomfort or irritation over time, and some patients choose to have them removed once healing is complete. This is a minor outpatient procedure.
- **Further Hip Surgery:** While PAO aims to preserve the hip joint and delay or prevent arthritis, some patients may still require additional surgery, such as a total hip replacement, later in life if arthritis develops.

4. When can I resume sports?

Most patients can return to sports and other physical activities around 5-6 months post-surgery, but this timeline depends on your recovery and the type of sport:

- **Low-Impact Activities:** Swimming, biking, and yoga can typically be resumed after 4-6 months.
- **High-Impact Sports:** Activities like running, soccer, or basketball may take longer, and you'll need to get clearance from your surgeon. Even after recovery, it's important to listen to your body and avoid pushing yourself too hard.

5. Will I have any long-term restrictions?

While many patients can return to normal activities without restrictions, you should be mindful of certain high-impact sports or activities that could put undue strain on your hip. Activities like long-distance running or intense jumping may increase the risk of future complications or arthritis.



Conclusion: Commitment to Recovery

The recovery process after PAO surgery is a gradual one, but with commitment to your physical therapy plan and proper care, most patients achieve excellent results. Be patient with yourself and follow your surgeon's and therapist's advice closely to ensure a smooth recovery.

For more information or if you have specific questions, feel free to contact our team at HipPreservation.org. We're here to support you through your recovery journey.