

## **Is there a limit to limb lengthening in patients with Crowe IV developmental dysplasia of the hip undergoing total hip arthroplasty?**

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### **Response/Recommendation:**

The review of current literature does not identify a specific limit to limb lengthening in patients undergoing total hip arthroplasty (THA). The traditional limit of 4 cm is based on an older single study with some methodological deficiencies.

**Level of Evidence: Low**

### **Rationale:**

We searched for all studies investigating the outcomes of total hip arthroplasty (THA) for hip arthritis secondary to Crowe III to IV developmental dysplasia of the hip (DDH) aiming to define a limb lengthening limit in such patients. We searched the following electronic databases: (PubMed: 865 results on 28 May 2024), (Central: 33 results on 26 April 2024), and (Embase: 835 results on 14 May 2024). After duplicates removal and exclusion of noneligible studies from title and abstract, 419 studies were eligible for full text screening. Finally, 91 studies[1][2][3][4][5][6][7][8][9][10][11][12][13][14][15][16][17][18][19][20][21][22][23][24][25][26][27][28][29][30][31][32][33][34][35][36][37][38][39][40][41][42][43][44][45][46][47][48][49][50][51][52][53][54][55][56][57][58][59][60][61][62][63][64][65][66][67][68][69][70][71][72][73][74][75][76][77][78][79][80][81][82][83][84][85][86][87][88][89][90][91] were included in this review. All included studies were cohort studies whether prospective or retrospective. In all included cohorts patients were treated with THA and had good outcomes in terms of satisfaction, range of motion, restoration of limb length, and functional outcomes.

The reason for the ongoing debate on limb lengthening in patients with dysplasia undergoing THA is because of a recognized correlation between limb lengthening and risk of neurological complication, mostly sciatic nerve palsy. Based on traditional belief, lengthening of the limb > 4 cm is believe to put the extremity at unacceptable risk of neurological complications[49]. The stated limit in limb lengthening means that some patients with unilateral dysplasia and short limb (>4 cm) cannot undergo restoration of their limb length and may sufferer limb length discrepancy. The belief in the stated limit also means that many surgeons resort to performing femoral shortening osteotomy if lengthening is likely to be > 4 cm.

Our review of the modern literature did not reveal a specific limit to limb lengthening. In fact there are reports in the literature suggesting that limit for limb lengthening should be determined using femoral length as a reference[44]. In a study by Kabata et al. the risk for neurological complications apperad to arise when limb lengthening exceeded 8.7% of the femoral length. [44]. Two comparative studies by Fujishiro et al. highlighted the influence of factors, other than limb

lengthening such as hip flexion contracture, and neurological complications in patients undergoing THA[9][60]. Another study proposed 50mm as a limit for limb lengthening[92]. Limb lengthening up to 51 mm was seen in some of the 58 studies that utilized femoral shortening osteotomy. Thirteen studies included cohort of patients with Crowe IV dysplasia in whom femoral osteotomy was not performed during THA. The mean limb lengthening in these patients ranged from 21 to 48mm. In nine studies, patients were subjected to staged procedures whereby limb lengthening occurred during the first surgery. If the patients did not develop neurological complications, definitive THA was performed during the second surgery. These studies reported a mean limb lengthening ranging from 36 to 100mm. The first stage operations included a variety of procedures. The initial lengthening might be achieved with a distraction nail, iliofemoral fixator or even initial hip periarticular extensive soft tissue release and traction. Some novel techniques away from femoral osteotomy and staged procedures were described in some cohorts aiming to achieve the reduction of the femoral head in the true acetabulum with minimal complications. Yan et al. described maintaining hip and knee in a flexed position following surgery and allowing for gradual knee extension until the patient felt numbness. They achieved an average limb lengthening of 40mm (range 29-62mm) using this technique [12]. In another study Shemesh et al. used an intraoperative nerve stimulator to assess neurological insults during THA procedures [81]. They stated that intraoperative nerve monitoring reduced the risk for nerve palsy and the need for femoral shortening osteotomies. The findings of latter study was corroborated by Kong et al. in their comparative retrospective cohort demonstrating a lower incidence of nerve palsy in patients in whom intraoperative nerve monitoring was used during THA[73].

In conclusion, there are limited and conflicting evidence about the limit of limb lengthening in patients undergoing THA, after which the risk for neurological complication increases. In the absence of such concrete limit, surgeons may decide to lengthen the extremity more than 4 cm to achieve equal limb length and avoid leaving these young patients with life long limb length discrepancy.

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