

Stroke: Stroke Rehabilitation



During a stroke, part of the brain is damaged. But the brain is an amazing organ that can adapt. A stroke rehabilitation ("rehab") program is the best way to help you regain skills you have lost and prevent a future stroke.

After a stroke, your best chance of getting back the skills you have lost is during the first few months. So it is important to use all the resources your stroke rehab program offers. Do all you can to recover and prevent a future stroke.

Recovery after a stroke can be tough, so keeping a positive outlook is key. You may see the most improvement in the first weeks to months. But you also may notice improvements for years to come.

Who is on a stroke rehab team?

You and your family, loved ones, and caregivers are the most important part of your stroke rehab team. Your team will also include doctors and nurses who specialize in stroke rehab, and other professionals such as:

- A physical therapist, who helps with movement, balance, and coordination.
- An occupational therapist, who helps you practice eating, bathing, dressing, writing, and other daily tasks.
- A speech-language therapist, for help with language skills and swallowing.
- A recreational therapist, who helps you return to activities you enjoy.
- A psychologist or counselor, to help you deal with your emotions.
- A dietitian, to plan a healthy diet.
- A vocational counselor, for help getting back to or finding work.

A social worker or case manager will help arrange for any help or equipment you need at home. If medical insurance does not cover your rehab program or equipment, ask for information about Medicare and other programs.

Adapting after a stroke

Recovering after a stroke may mean making changes at home, at work, and in relationships.

- It is normal at first to feel sad or hopeless after a stroke. But if the "blues" last, talk to your doctor. Get treatment if you are depressed.
- Do not drive until your doctor says it is okay.
- Get more active, slowly. Start out by walking a little more each day. Take short rest breaks when you get tired.
- Get the support you need. Talk to others who have had a stroke, and find out how they handled problems.
- Get your loved ones involved in your treatment. Let them help you.

Medicines

To help prevent another stroke, you may take one or more medicines for high blood pressure, high cholesterol, or blood clots. Your doctor may also prescribe medicine for depression, pain, sleep problems, anxiety, or agitation.

Take your medicine exactly as prescribed. Call your doctor if you think you are having a problem with your medicine. Do not take any over-the-counter medicines or herbal products without talking to your doctor first.

If you are taking blood-thinners to prevent blood clots and another stroke:

- Tell your dentist, pharmacist, and other health professionals that you take blood-thinners. Wear medical alert jewelry with the name of your medicine on it.
- Watch for unusual bruising or bleeding, such as blood in your urine, red or black stools, or bleeding from your nose or gums.
- If you are taking warfarin (Coumadin), get regular blood tests to check your clotting time so your doctor can keep your dose at a safe level.

Preventing another stroke

After a stroke, you are at risk of having another one. This is especially true if you have high blood pressure, heart disease, high cholesterol, or diabetes, or are obese. Smoking and too much alcohol or caffeine also raise your risk of having a stroke.

To prevent another stroke:

- Take all medicines your doctor prescribes.
- Get regular exercise. Your doctor can suggest a safe level of exercise for you.
- Limit how much caffeine, animal fat, sugar, and processed foods you eat.
- Eat plenty of fruits, vegetables, and high-fiber foods.
- If you use tobacco, quit. And avoid secondhand smoke.
- Limit your alcohol use.

For family members and caregivers

- Help make the home safe. Set up a well-lit living space with a bathroom on the same floor. Move throw rugs and furniture that could cause falls. Put grab bars and a seat in the tub or shower.
- Find out what your loved one can do and what he or she needs help with. Try not to do things for your loved one that your loved one can do on his or her own. Help him or her learn and practice new skills.
- Visit and talk with your loved one often. Do activities together, such as playing cards or board games. Encourage friends to visit.
- Ask others to help. And if you can, use home health care to help with rehab, or try adult day care.
- Take care of yourself. Eat well, get enough rest, and take time for yourself. Keep up with your own medical needs. Join a support group.