

# Recovering from a Massive Stroke: Symptoms, Treatments, & Timeline

June 2, 2017



If you're trying to learn more about recovery after massive stroke, then you've come to the right place. To help you determine your massive stroke recovery prognosis, we will discuss the common side effects of massive stroke as well as your treatment options for each. We will also discuss how long massive stroke recovery tends to take.

But first off, we need to set something straight.

## Why No One Will Give You a Straight Answer

It's crucial to understand that every stroke is different and therefore every recovery will be different. With that said, it's very hard to provide a massive stroke prognosis that applies to all survivors of massive stroke. However, there are still patterns to remain aware of that will help provide guidance on your road to recovery.

Let's start with some basic information.

# What is Considered a Massive Stroke?

In our [stroke recovery prognosis series](#) (which we highly recommend if you're benefiting from this article), we discussed the NIH Stroke Scale. The NIH Stroke Scale assesses the degree of severity of various stroke side effects. Patients who score 21-42 on the NIH Stroke scale are considered to have suffered a massive stroke.

Now, what does this mean for your recovery?

## Massive Stroke Side Effects & Recovery

By using the NIH Stroke Scale, we can determine which side effects survivors of massive stroke might experience. If you have survived a massive stroke, then you may suffer from some or all of these 5 major side effects:

1. Paralysis on one side of the body and face
2. Impaired eye movement/vision problems
3. Sensory loss (the inability to feel sensation)
4. Loss of speech (known as aphasia)
5. Attention difficulty

The side effects of massive stroke are severe, but everything is treatable. Here are ways to treat these stroke side effects.

## 3-Step Treatment for Paralysis after Massive Stroke

Paralysis is common after massive stroke, which is why this explanation is the longest.

### Step 1: The Importance of Neuroplasticity & Rehab Exercise

If a massive stroke has left you with paralysis on one or both sides of your body, then you can regain movement through rehab exercise. The purpose of rehab exercise is to **activate neuroplasticity**, which is how your brain rewires and heals after stroke. Each time you repeat a movement, you activate neuroplasticity and strengthen the part of your brain that controls movement.

**The stronger your brain gets, the better you get at moving.**

### Step 2: Activate Neuroplasticity to the Max

The best way to activate neuroplasticity is through **high repetition**. High repetition during rehab exercise is critical for recovery. However, this can be challenging with paralysis.

Therefore, stroke survivors with post-stroke paralysis should start with passive rehab exercises.

### Step 3: Start with Passive Exercise First

Passive means that you have someone assist your body to move it, or you use your non-affected side to move your affected side. Although you aren't 'doing the movement on your own,' you're still activating neuroplasticity. And with enough passive exercise consistently over time, you can regain a small amount of movement in your affected side; at which point you can move onto active exercise.

## Treatment for Impaired Vision After Massive Stroke

Your vision is controlled by both muscle and brain. First, there are 6 muscles that control your eye, and then the visual information that goes through your eyes is interpreted by your visual cortex. Sometimes stroke affects your eye muscles, and the best treatment for that is eye exercises. This will help retrain your brain how to control your eyes and restore your vision. Other times stroke affects your visual cortex, and that can be treated too.

Read our guide to treating vision problems to learn more.

## Treatment for Sensory Loss After Massive Stroke

If you have trouble feeling sensation on your affected side of the body (like trouble feeling hot or cold, or trouble feeling everything), then you may have sensory problems. And like all other stroke side effects, this can be treated through exercise! Specifically, sensory reeducation exercise.

Sensory reeducation exercises help retrain your brain how to interpret your senses. And like always, performing these exercises repetitively and consistently will help you improve your senses faster. Are you starting to feel empowered knowing that all stroke side effects can be cured through good, consistent practice?

## Treatment for Loss of Speech After Massive Stroke

When stroke affects your ability to speak, this condition is known as aphasia. Aphasia can be treated through therapy with a speech-language pathologist. You can also look into singing therapy.

Singing therapy is effective because although a patient with aphasia cannot say their words, they can most likely sing them. That's because language is controlled by your brain's left hemisphere, but music and singing is controlled by your right hemisphere. If your stroke only affected one side of your brain, then singing therapy is a good option to look into.

## Treatment for Difficulty Paying Attention

The mental process of attention can be affected by stroke. When stroke patients are not able to pay attention to their affected side, this condition is known as **one-sided neglect**.

Like all stroke side effects, this can be treated through practice. To cure one-sided neglect, make it a frequent exercise to turn to your affected side and pay attention to what's there. No need to overcomplicate things. Just turn to your affected side and absorb everything that's going on in the environment over there. This will help train your brain to pay attention to your affected side, and you'll start to get better and better at paying attention.

## More Information on Stroke Side Effects

This was a "quick" synopsis of how to treat the side effects of massive stroke. Although it was long, it was still the condensed version. If you'd like more details, check out the [guide to physical, cognitive, and emotional stroke side effects](#).

Now let's get to the question everyone wants to know...

## How Long Does It Take to Recover from Massive Stroke?

This question is complicated because different stroke survivors can have drastically different degrees of stroke severity. Someone who scored a 25 on the NIH Stroke Scale may recover much faster than someone who scored a 40.

However, we have noticed some general patterns based on what we see in our [stroke support group](#). Here's what we learned:

- Doctors often underestimate how much you can recover after massive stroke
- If you are persistent, you can start walking (with the help of a walker or cane) within 6 months
- Sometimes it takes longer, sometimes it's even sooner!
- The amount of recovery that you experience is directly correlated to how hard you pursue recovery
- Those who are determined and disciplined tend to recover more
- 2 years after a massive stroke, patients seem to have regained significant function – enough to resume working and independent living
- Having a positive attitude and strong faith is correlated with a higher recovery

We hope this is helpful and gives you an idea of how long it will take to recover from massive stroke. Although we cannot provide a concrete answer (because those do not exist unfortunately), what we can tell you is this:

*You can recover whatever you put your mind to. And if you truly believe in yourself, you can have a **speedy recovery**. If your doctors or therapists told you that you can't do something, then kindly disregard their limiting beliefs and keep trying. Just because someone said you'll never walk again does NOT mean that you'll never walk again. It's simply a reflection of their limiting beliefs, and you can choose to have your own beliefs.*

*Always believe in yourself, and you can become stronger after a massive stroke.*