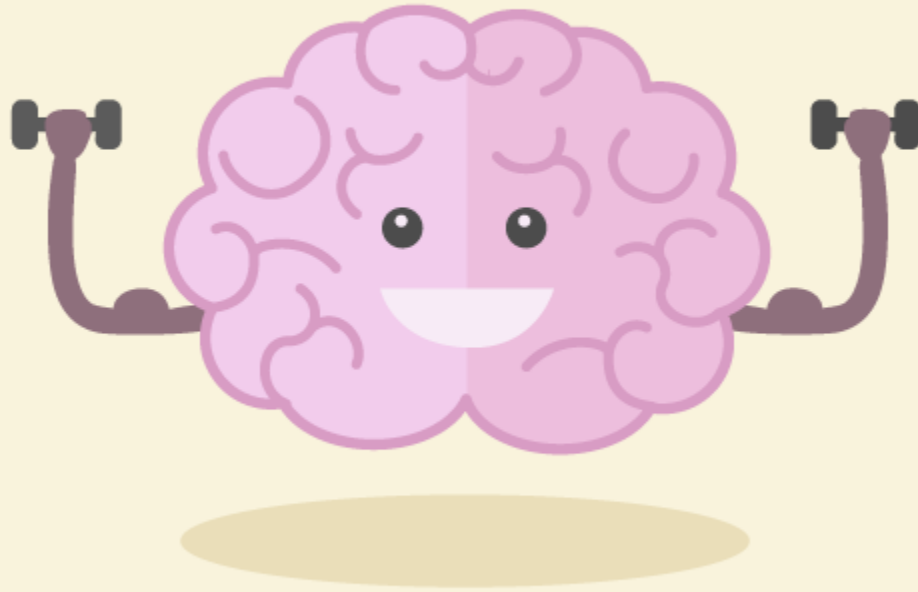


# Stroke Rehab Starts in the Brain, Not the Body

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A common misconception in stroke rehabilitation is that the problem lies in your muscles, and therefore the solution lies in your muscles.

The truth, however, is that the solution lies in your *brain*.

It is crucial to understand that your muscles are only part of the equation. While they definitely need attention (especially after the [atrophy](#) that tends to happen in the hospital), it's your brain that needs more attention.

That's what rehab exercises are for. They aren't necessarily growing your muscles – they're *retraining your brain* how to use those muscles.

Before we dig further into this, let's discuss the difference between traditional exercise and rehab exercise.

## Traditional vs. Rehab Exercise

To put it simply: traditional exercise strengthens your *muscles* and rehabilitation exercise strengthens your *brain*.

When you think of traditional exercise, you may think of treadmills, dumbbells, bench presses, and other cardio and weight training equipment.

The purpose of traditional exercise is to strengthen your muscles, lungs, and heart. You typically break a sweat and feel either slightly tired or more energetic afterward.

When you think of rehab exercise, however, you may think of something very different.

Rehab exercise typically involves simple, repetitive movements. For example, moving wooden blocks from one box to another or standing on one foot for 30 seconds.

The purpose of rehab exercise is to retrain your brain. You may not break a dripping sweat during the exercise, but it can definitely leave you exhausted after.

## Rehab Exercises and Exhaustion

Have you ever felt this exhaustion before?

For example, have you ever noticed that you feel really tired after doing a [series of hand exercises](#)? The fatigue that you feel isn't really in your hand (although some of it might be). Rather, the fatigue is in your brain.

**As you send stimulation to your brain during rehab exercises, your brain begins to rewire itself through neuroplasticity. This is how you recover movement after stroke.**

All that rewiring, however, sucks up a lot of energy; which is why many rehab exercises leave you feeling tired and craving a nap. Even if a long session of traditional exercise may not have required a nap before stroke – a solid nap after some rehab exercise may very well be the case now.

This illustrates how rehab exercise really challenges your brain and depletes energy levels. So always nap if your body asks for it!

## Getting Your Reps In

Another big difference between traditional and rehab exercise is that rehab exercise really emphasizes reps.

Sure, traditional exercise also emphasizes reps based on your physical fitness goals (like 5 reps or 8 reps of each exercise) – but they also focus on duration and amount of weight used (if resistance training).

However, reps are the *meat and potatoes* of rehab exercise. They take center stage because it really makes a difference.

Because the more you practice something, the more your brain rewires itself and gets better at that thing! (Read about [neuroplasticity](#).)

## Summary

Rehab exercise is very different than traditional exercise.

While traditional exercise focuses on strengthening your muscles, rehab exercise focuses on retraining your brain. This is achieved through a focus on high reps and plenty of rest!

Because rehab starts in the brain, not the body.