Hemiplegia vs Hemiparesis after Stroke

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Hemiplegia and hemiparesis might sound very similar, but they have completely different meanings. In this article, you'll learn the difference between hemiplegia vs hemiparesis after stroke and how to treat both of these stroke side effects.

Hemiplegia Defined

To put it simply, we'll break down the word parts and then establish what the word means. "Hemi" means "half" and "plegia" means "paralysis or stroke." When combined, hemiplegia means that half your body is paralyzed due to a stroke.

Hemiparesis Defined

Although "paresis" also sounds like paralyzation, it actually means "weakness or *partial* loss of movement." So hemiparesis occurs when half of your body is weakened or has suffered partial loss of movement. Hemiparesis is a less severe form of hemiplegia.

Treating Hemiplegia vs Hemiparesis after Stroke

There are 3 ways to treat hemiplegia and hemiparesis after stroke.

1. Exercise

If you remember one thing, remember this: Do NOT neglect paralyzed limbs (8/17/2015). If paralyzed or weakened limbs are neglected, it can lead to increased muscle stiffness and eventually cause your brain to forget how to use that limb altogether in a condition known as learned nonuse. Instead, make sure that you get your affected limbs moving through either passive or active exercises (10/6/2015).

Stroke survivors with hemiparesis can benefit from active range of motion exercises that can help strengthen the weakened muscles. Survivors with hemiplegia can also benefit from rehab exercises if they have some small movements that can be strengthened, too.

2. Orthotics

In some cases, the use of supportive braces (or orthotics) are needed to maintain proper joint alignment. For example, if your foot is weakened and you suffer from foot drop, the use of a supportive foot brace (or an ankle-foot orthotic) might be needed. In other cases, the use of a sling might be needed if the ligaments in the shoulder are no longer able to hold the upper arm bone in its socket.

3. Compensation

For stroke survivors with hemiplegia, some compensatory techniques might be necessary (9/28/2015). Around the house, adaptive equipment can help you get from one place to another safely and surely. In your wardrobe, adaptive clothing can provide necessary convenience and even allow you to change your full wardrobe from a completely seated position.

Which Treatment Is Right for You?

All of these treatments are vastly different, and you might be wondering which one you should choose. First off, orthotics and compensation techniques might be essential for you right now because of your safety. If you have foot drop or impaired leg movement, then you have a greater chance of falling; and orthotics and compensation techniques can help you get around safely.

But there's a caveat to this. While compensation techniques help you adapt to your stroke side effects, your ultimate goal should be to overcome those side effects, not adapt to them. This is where neuroplasticity and exercise really help you out. Let's dig into the best practices.

The Best Way to Overcome Hemiplegia or Hemiparesis

To heal the brain after stroke, you need to activate neuroplasticity, the mechanism that rewires your brain. When neuroplasticity is activated, your brain forms new neural connections around the damage. This allows you to relearn skills and regain your independence.

Neuroplasticity is activated through repetitive practice. Whatever you repeat over and over and over is what your brain gets good at. So if you suffer from foot drop, then the best way to treat your foot drop is through exercise. Each time you repeat a foot drop exercise, you start to rebuild connections in your brain that control your foot movement. The more you exercise, the better you will get.

Be Careful with Compensation

That's why you should always be careful with compensation techniques (6/20/2016).

Because if you develop a dependency on your foot orthosis, for example, then you might completely stop using your foot; and eventually your brain will completely forget how to use your foot. This creates dependency upon your orthosis in order to get around.

Exercise helps promote your independence by restoring your body's natural ability to move. This is NOT to say that compensation techniques are bad and should be avoided. You may truly need them right now for your safety and well-being. However, if you are using compensation techniques, stay curious about them. Question them often. Constantly ask yourself, "Do I need this compensation technique still? Can I challenge myself past it now?" This way you'll never get stuck in your recovery. Instead, you'll keep pushing yourself further and further along the road to recovery.

Resources for Hemiplegia and Hemiparesis

If you or a loved one are recovering from hemiplegia or hemiparesis after stroke, then it's important to educate yourself on all the stroke side effects and treatments available. Here are some great resources that can help:

- 5 Steps to Cure Post Stroke Paralysis – 3/10/2017
- The Danger of Not Using Your Muscles After Stroke & What to Do About It – 1/6/2017
- 5 Stroke Paralysis Treatments You Probably Didn't Know About – 7/18/2016
- A Survivor's Guide to Becoming a Stroke Recovery Expert – 7/8/2016

We hope you find them useful!