

# Stroke Recovery Getting Worse? Don't Freak Out & Do This Instead

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Are your symptoms during stroke recovery getting worse? Have you started backsliding rapidly? This could be a phenomenon called *regression* that should be taken very seriously.

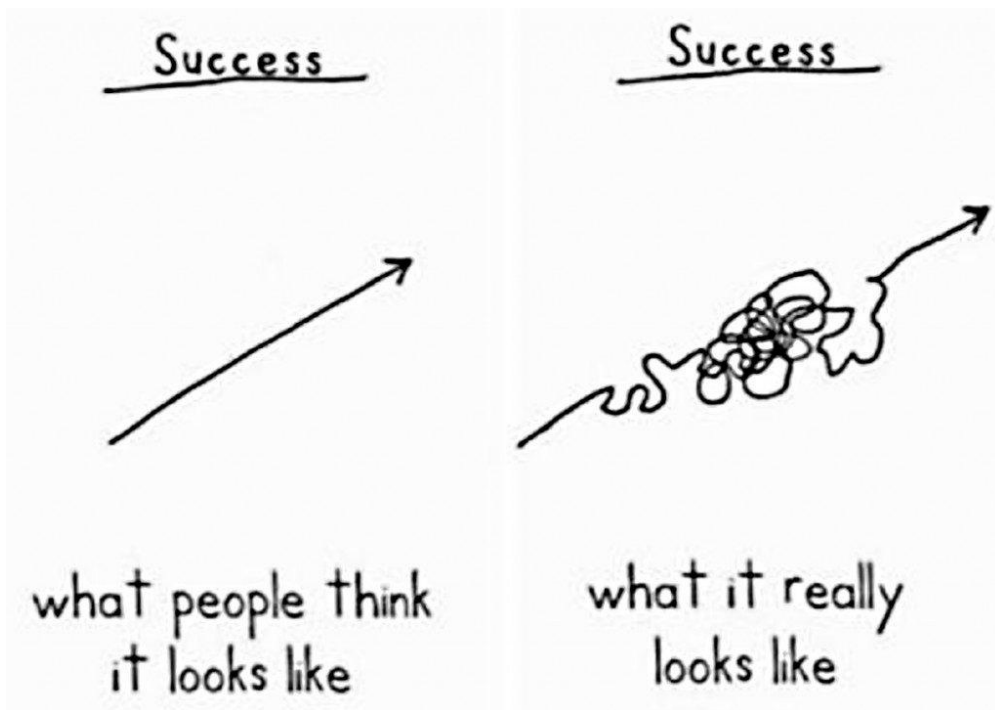
In this article, we will help distinguish between a normal backslide and a regression that deserves medical attention.

Then, we'll share how to bust through regression and get back on the road to recovery.

## Normal vs. Abnormal Regression After Stroke

It's important to acknowledge that stroke recovery does not move in a straight line. Taking two steps forward and one step back is normal. In fact, taking two steps forward and four steps back sometimes is also normal.

When you zoom out and look at the big picture, there should be an overall pattern of progress. Your backward steps should be cancelled out by your forward steps over the long-run.



Drawing by Demitri Martin

So if you're going through a phase this week or month where your progress is slipping, acknowledge that there's normally an ebb and flow to stroke recovery.

However, if you wake up one morning and your stroke side effects are dramatically worse than the previous night, then it's time to dial 9-1-1 because it could be a medical emergency.

Whenever there's a dramatic, sharp decline in progress, it could be a sign that something is going wrong and it's best to seek medical attention as soon as possible.

## Causes for Symptoms Getting Worse

If your stroke symptoms have been getting worse, then it's time to do some investigating to get to the bottom of it.

Here are 3 causes of regression after stroke:

1. Doing things differently.

Have you started doing anything dramatically different lately? For example, have you started walking a lot whereas you were sedentary before? Sometimes big changes can affect your body in a big way – and not necessarily for the better.

## 2. Taking new medication.

Sometimes new medication can cause negative side effects. For example, some stroke survivors report regression after taking anti-depressants, and they also report the regression reversing itself once they stop taking it.

**Don't tinker with your medication without consulting a doctor, though!** Instead, bring up your regression to your doctor and ask if there's any way to change your medications to see if it helps.

## 3. Overworking yourself.

Sometimes *post-stroke fatigue* has a delayed onset. If you 'go hard' and do a bunch of things all in one day, then you could experience a regression the next day. Keep a journal and notate how much you're doing and how you're feeling. There could be a link that isn't obvious until you see it all written down.

## What If You Can't Identify the Cause of Your Regression?

If you can't identify the cause of your regression, then try talking with your **physiatrist, neurologist, or therapist**. (S)he might be able to help identify what's going wrong. Post-stroke regression is a mysterious phenomenon, though, and doctors are often unable to pinpoint exactly what's causing the regression.

If that happens to you, *don't freak out*. There are plenty of actions that you can take to make sure you start progressing on the road to recovery again.

## How to Bust Through a Regression

If you think you're going through the normal ebb of recovery (i.e. a small regression), here are 4 ways to bust through it and get your results flowing again.

### 1. Go slow and steady.

Stroke recovery is not a race. Although a speedy recovery is what everyone wants, it's easy to burn yourself out by trying to do too many things at once.

During stroke recovery, your brain is rapidly trying to heal itself, which uses up a lot of your mental juice. When you push yourself hard, you zap what's remaining of your mental juice and you're left running on fumes.

To avoid regression, it's best to aim for the slow and steady pace instead of rushing and eventually suffering from burnout.

## 2. Get plenty of sleep.

Sleep is sooo important during stroke recovery. It gives your brain a chance to rest and recharge. If you don't sleep when your body wants, then you will have a slower recovery. Your brain won't have a chance to do the healing it needs, and you'll self-sabotage. So let yourself sleep! Also, it's important to know that the desire for lots of sleep is not a sign of regression. The desire for sleep is perfectly normal and healthy in a stroke survivor. See article 9/2/2015.

## 3. Be consistent with your regimen.

Consistency is key when it comes to stroke recovery. If you work on your rehabilitation just a little bit each day, you will see big results over the long-run. If you become inconsistent, however, you put yourself at risk of backsliding and regression.

Your brain is rapidly trying to heal itself through the phenomenon of neuroplasticity, which is how your brain rewires itself and forms new neural connections. Consistent stimulation is [the best way to rewire your brain](#). Without consistency, the new connections in your brain can start to weaken and you might lose all of your hard work.

## 4. Practice with high repetition.

Aside from consistency, the best way to rewire your brain and heal after stroke is with high repetition. When you repeat something, you activate neuroplasticity and strengthen the connections in your brain that control that task. For example, the more you practice your **hand therapy exercises**, the stronger the connections in your brain become that control hand function. The more you practice, the better your hand function will become. So if you find yourself regressing in a particular area of your recovery, start utilizing **repetitive practice** to get yourself back on track.

## Stroke Recovery Gets Better

Overall, it's important to understand that stroke recovery naturally has an ebb and flow. Sometimes you'll take two steps forward and one step backward. As long as there's an overall trend of progress, then small setbacks are nothing to worry about.

If you experience rapid, sudden worsening of stroke side effects, then it's time to seek medical attention immediately. It could be a sign of something going wrong, or it could simply be caused by new medication or pushing yourself too hard. It's up to you and your doctor to identify the cause.

Luckily, there are many things you can do at home to ensure that you bust through your regression, including being very consistent with your rehabilitation. The slow and steady route will serve you very well during stroke recovery.