



9707 E. Easter Lane, Suite B
Centennial, CO 80112-3754
1-800-STROKES (787-6537)

National Stroke Association's Guide to Choosing Stroke Rehabilitation Services

Rehabilitation, often referred to as rehab, is an important part of stroke recovery. Through rehab, you:

- Re-learn basic skills such as talking, eating, dressing and walking.
- Increase your strength, flexibility and endurance.
- Regain as much independence as possible.

You and your loved ones want the best rehab program possible. But, it is important to remember that all stroke survivors are not the same. Not only do they have different brain injuries and disabilities, but also different interests, lifestyles and priorities. What is best for you may not be the best for someone else.

So, how do you choose the best rehab program for you?

Use this guide to learn more about stroke rehab programs and to help you find a good fit.

After reading this guide, you will be able to:

- Tell the difference between one stroke rehab setting and another.
- Identify who's who on the stroke rehab team.
- Understand "discharge planning" and what it can include.
- Determine if a rehab program meets current rehabilitation industry standards.
- Set apart an excellent program from a good to average program.
- Figure out if a rehab program meets your personal needs.

If you have questions about stroke recovery, contact National Stroke Association by calling 1-800-STROKES (1-800-787-6537) or visiting our website at www.stroke.org.

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Understanding Stroke Rehabilitation Programs

Most stroke survivors will receive treatment in a stroke rehab program. There are several types of rehab programs for stroke survivors. These programs differ from each other in three ways:

- Type and range of services provided
- Frequency of services
- Setting (where the treatment occurs)

Stroke Rehab Settings

Stroke rehab programs can be found in many different settings. Your doctors will usually suggest the most rigorous program you can handle. They will decide what you can handle based on your age, overall health and degree of disability.

Some stroke rehab programs are inpatient programs and others are outpatient programs. An inpatient program will assign you a room to live in while you are being treated. An outpatient program will provide treatment to you but not admit you to stay overnight.

Programs	Services	Setting	Frequency	Likely Candidates
Acute care (inpatient) and rehab hospitals	24-hour medical care and a full range of rehab services	Hospital or special rehab unit of a hospital	Several hours each day (most demanding)	Survivors who have many medical issues and may develop problems without continued medical treatment
Sub-acute facilities	Provide daily nursing care and a fairly wide range of rehab	Rehab center, rehab unit of a hospital, skilled nursing facility (short-term nursing care) or skilled nursing home (long-term), skilled	Less demanding than acute programs, but continue for longer periods of time	Survivors who have serious disabilities but are unable to handle the demands of acute programs

	services	nursing unit in a hospital		
Long-term care facilities	One or more treatment areas	Nursing home, skilled nursing facility	2-3 days per week	Survivors who have their medical problems under control but still need 24-hour nursing care
Outpatient facilities	One or more treatment areas	Doctor's office, outpatient center of a hospital, other outpatient centers	2-3 days per week	Survivors who have their medical problems under control enough to live in their own homes and can travel to get their treatment
Home health agencies	Specific rehab services in one or more treatment areas	In the home	As needed	Survivors who live at home but are unable to travel to get their treatment

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Stroke Rehabilitation Team

To help you meet your stroke recovery goals, your rehab program will be planned by a team of professionals. This team may include some of the following:

Physiatrist	Specializes in rehabilitation following injuries, accidents or illness
Neurologist	Specializes in the prevention, diagnosis and treatment of stroke and other diseases of the brain and spinal cord
Rehabilitation Nurse	Specializes in helping people with disabilities; helps survivors manage health problems that affect stroke (diabetes, high blood pressure) and adjust to life after stroke
Physical Therapist (PT)	Helps stroke survivors with problems in moving and balance; suggests exercises to strengthen muscles for walking, standing and other activities
Occupational Therapist (OT)	Helps stroke survivors learn strategies to manage daily activities such as eating, bathing, dressing, writing or cooking
Speech-Language Pathologists (SLP)	Helps stroke survivors re-learn language skills (talking, reading and writing); shares strategies to help with swallowing problems
Dietician	Teaches survivors about healthy eating and special diets (low salt, low fat, low calorie)
Social Worker	Helps survivors make decisions about rehab programs, living arrangements, insurance, and support services in the home
Neuropsychologist	Diagnoses and treats survivors who may be facing changes in thinking, memory, and behavior after stroke
Case Manager	Helps survivors facilitate follow-up to acute care, coordinate care from multiple providers, and link to local services
Recreation Therapist	Helps stroke survivors learn strategies to improve the thinking and movement skills needed to join in recreational activities

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Discharge Planning

Discharge planning is the process of preparing you to live independently in the home. The purpose is to help maintain the benefits of rehabilitation after you have been released from the program. It begins early during rehabilitation and involves you, your family and the stroke rehab team. You should be discharged from rehab soon after your goals have been reached.

Discharge planning can include:

- Making sure you have a safe place to live after discharge.
- Deciding what care, assistance, or special equipment you will need.
- Arranging for more rehab services or for other services in the home.
- Choosing the health care provider who will monitor your health and medical needs.
- Determining the caregivers who will provide daily care, supervision, and assistance at home.
- Determining which community services may be helpful now or after some time. Examples include meal delivery, volunteer rides to the rehab center, visitor programs and caregiver relief programs.

Finding the Right Fit Standards of Excellence – CARF and JCAHO

Many industries have a formal system of recognizing organizations that meet standards of excellence in their field. This is called accreditation or certification. For hospitals and rehabilitation centers, the Commission on Accreditation of Healthcare Organizations (CARF) and the Joint Commission on Accreditation of Healthcare Organizations (JCAHO) set these standards. Medicare also certifies rehab programs and centers that meet minimum health and safety standards.

Some examples of requirements for CARF accreditation include:

- A medical director and doctors who are board certified in rehab-related specialties such as physiatry or neurology.
- A team approach for patient care.
- Regular rehab team meetings to evaluate each patient's progress.

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- Involvement of family members in the program.
- Regular family meetings to keep them up-to-date with the progress of their loved ones.
- Patient and family education.
- Patient and family support.
- Defined process for handling emergencies.
- Ongoing assessment of each patient's progress in terms of abilities and level of independence in activities of daily living (such as dressing and walking).

You may want to ask rehabilitation centers to explain how they handle some of these areas.

Narrowing Down Your Options

An excellent stroke rehab program should also meet standards of excellence not required for CARF or Medicare certification. This can set apart an excellent program from a good to average program. Use the attached checklist to help you find the excellent program that you deserve.

After you narrow down your list of programs that meet current rehabilitation standards, you can focus on finding a nearby program that meets your personal needs. The attached checklist can help you determine if a rehab program meets your needs.

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Checklist: Finding an Excellent Program

Name of Program: _____

QUESTIONS TO ASK	YES	NO	NOTES
Has the program been in operation at least one year?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>	
Does the program have a formal system for evaluating the progress made by its patients and the overall outcomes of the stroke rehab program?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>	
Does the program have any partners that offer rehab services at other levels of care that I may eventually need (day treatment, outpatient treatment or home care)?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>	
Does the program provide a wide range of therapy services? (physical therapy, occupational therapy, speech therapy)	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>	
Does the program have on staff a full-time physiatrist or another doctor who is experienced in stroke and rehab medicine?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>	
Is medical care available at the rehab center if I need it?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>	
Can my doctor visit me at the rehab center? (Does he/she have visiting privileges?)	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>	
Does the program have a stroke support group for survivors and their families? If not, can they refer me to a local group?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>	
Does the program use outside groups (such as consumer advocacy groups) to get ideas for serving disabled people?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>	
Does the program conduct home visits before checking people out of the center and releasing them to their homes?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>	
Are staff members required to keep up with new information about stroke and rehabilitation? How do they do so?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>	

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Checklist: Meeting Personal Needs

TREATMENTS & SERVICES:	YES	NO	NOTES
Does the facility offer the rehab treatments that I need?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Am I eligible for those treatments?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
How can these treatments help me?	N/A	N/A	
Will there be bilingual staff members if I need them?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Will there be sign language interpreters if I need them?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Will medical information be explained in simple terms?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Is help available with discharge? How does it work?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
What percent of people will return home after discharge? What percent of people will be placed in nursing homes?	N/A	N/A	

LOCATION:	YES	NO	NOTES
Is it convenient to me?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Is it close to public transportation?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Is it convenient to family and friends?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	

HOURS:	YES	NO	NOTES
Are the days and times convenient for me?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
What are the visiting hours?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Are the visiting hours convenient for family and friends?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Are the visiting hours long enough for a good quality visit?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	

COST & INSURANCE	YES	NO	NOTES
What is the estimated cost of my treatment?	N/A	N/A	
Will my insurance plan or government funding (Medicare, Medicaid, state health plans) cover all or part of the cost?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Will the staff help me with health insurance claims or appeals, if needed?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
What is the average total cost for the complete stroke program (acute rehab, home care, outpatient)?	N/A	N/A	

CUSTOMER SERVICE & SATISFACTION	YES	NO	NOTES
Does the program collect information from patients and their families about satisfaction with the care received?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Is so, is the feedback generally positive?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Can I talk to other people who have used the services?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
How long do most stroke survivors stay in the program?	N/A	N/A	

*NSA publications are reviewed for scientific and medical accuracy by the NSA Publications Committee.
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