

# A Survivor's Guide to Becoming a Stroke Recovery Expert

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Every stroke survivor should become their own stroke recovery expert because *it will open so many doors!*

First we'll explain *why*, and then move onto the *how*.

## Ask Better Questions

Becoming a stroke recovery expert will help you *ask better questions*. This is crucial for discovering new opportunities.

For example, a survivor who asks his therapist, "Will mirror therapy help my hand function improve?" will get a much better response than someone who says, "Why aren't my hand exercises working?"

With the second statement, a therapist may simply explain why it's not working, and leave it at that. With the first statement, a therapist will consider whether or not mirror therapy is a good fit for you, and if so, they'll probably try it out!

This could lead to much more success and far less frustration on your end.

So don't be afraid to ask knowledgeable questions! And if you aren't seeing a therapist regularly, you can ask your questions right here on the blog in the comments section.

Now, in order to ask knowledgeable questions, you need to start with good understanding.

So let's dig in, shall we?

## Understanding How the Brain Recovers

To quickly cover the basics, a stroke is a 'brain attack' that cuts off the supply of blood to parts of the brain, resulting in the loss of brain cells in that area. These damaged parts of the brain can no longer fulfill their duties, which creates stroke side effects, like impaired movement.

The brain has a mechanism to heal itself after injury like this by rewiring healthy, surrounding parts of the brain to take over lost functions of the damaged parts of the brain.

This rewiring process is called [neuroplasticity](#) – and it's the single most important thing for all stroke survivors to become experts on.

We recommend reading [How the Brain Changes Itself](#) for deep insight into the phenomenon. (We are unaffiliated with the book, and the link is unaffiliated as well.)

## Rinse, Repeat

As an expert on neuroplasticity, you should know that the best way to trigger it is through [repetitive practice](#). Each time you repeat a thought or action, the connections in your brain responsible for that thought or action become stronger.

Then, each time you repeat thereafter, the connections will continue to get stronger and stronger. That's how repetitive rehab exercise leads to improved movement.

## Why You Need Lots of Sleep

As you continue to diligently perform your rehab exercises, your brain will continue to heal, and it will take up a LOT of your energy.

Your brain normally uses 20% of your energy – and that percentage only goes up when it's trying to heal itself. So if you feel like taking naps all the time after stroke, *listen to your body*.

[Sleeping a lot after stroke](#) is perfectly normal, and sleep is *highly recommended* during recovery.

Allow yourself to sleep as much as you want/can.

## Never Stop Moving

Every survivor should also be aware of the phenomenon of [learned nonuse](#).

Learned nonuse occurs when you completely stop using your affected muscles. And if the neglect continues for long enough, it can cause your brain to *completely forget* how to use those muscles!

That's why it's important to move your affected muscles at least a little everyday – otherwise you can completely lose it. (The phrase “use it or lose it” came from this concept.)

So move a little every day and you'll prevent this from happening.

## Know All Your Therapy Options

And there are many, many ways to move.

During stroke recovery, it's essential to experiment with various therapies until you find the one that benefits you the most. Some of these options include [mirror therapy](#), [constraint-induced movement therapy](#), and [music therapy](#) – among others.

Do some good research and see what resonates with you.

Trying different forms of therapy is also a great way to bust through a plateau.

## Understanding Plateaus

As you move through your recovery, you may hit a wall about three months in where your results start to slow down. Don't panic – this is a natural plateau, which does not imply an end. We repeat...

[A PLATEAU DOES NOT MEAN THE END OF RECOVERY!](#)

Recovery only stops when you stop. A plateau simply means that things are slowing down for the time being, but you can continue to improve so long as you stick with your regimen.

## Rehab Exercise at Home

There are a few keys to [succeeding at rehab at home](#), and the biggest key is to *take small steps*.

When you're at home and don't feel like exercising, try to do it for just 5 minutes. Five minutes, and that's all. Chances are, once you get going, you won't stop. And even if you do – those 5 minutes are still helping your brain rewire itself!

If you ever want to switch up your at-home regimen, we have a lot of [stroke rehab exercises here on the blog](#) that you can try.

Up next is part 2: [How to Deal with Stroke Side Effects and Limitations the Smart Way](#)