The Answers to Post Stroke Spasticity That No One Talks About

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Post stroke spasticity is the most common post stroke side effect, and it's likely that you've never heard the whole truth about it.

The causes of spasticity are somewhat talked about, but no one really discusses the root cause of the problem. Today we're sharing the most valuable way to fix this frustrating problem, starting with the basics, the part that everyone talks about, and moving on to the lesser-known stuff later.

Spasticity as Brain-Muscle Miscommunication

You've probably heard spasticity explained in relation to your muscles.

Spasticity causes your muscles to become tightened, so it's natural to focus on your muscles as what needs to be fixed. But spasticity is actually caused by miscommunication between your brain and your muscles.

Normally your muscles are in constant communication with your brain about how much tension they're feeling, and the brain has to constantly monitor this tension to prevent tearing. Your brain continuously sends out messages telling your muscles when to contract and relax.

When a stroke damages part of the brain responsible for muscle control, this communication is thrown off. The damaged part of your brain no longer receives the messages that your muscles are trying to send, and as a result, your brain no longer tells them when to contract or relax.

That's the cause of spasticity from the brain-muscle perspective.

However, there's a *second layer* to spasticity that no one talks about. Spasticity is also caused by miscommunication from your *spinal cord*.

The OTHER Cause of Spasticity

While your muscles are always in communication with your brain, they're also in communication with your spinal cord.

Usually the spinal cord takes the messages from your muscles and sends them up to the brain. But since the brain is no longer reading those messages, your affected muscles have no one to talk to.

So the spinal cord takes over.

But the spinal cord doesn't know how to properly operate your muscles. It really only has one goal: to prevent your muscles from tearing. In order to do that, your spinal cord sends signals to keep your muscles in a constant state of contraction, which is what causes spasticity.

Your spinal cord only has the best intentions – to prevent your muscles from tearing – but it's frustrating because now your muscles are painfully stiff.

Let's look at some temporary and permanent treatment options to fix this issue and alleviate your spasticity.

How to Temporarily Treat Spasticity

There are temporary ways to treat spasticity, which includes locally administered or orally taken drugs.

Locally administered drugs are injected into the affected muscles and help reduce pain, increase movement, and curb potential bone and joint problems.

Orally taken drugs offer the same benefits, but they are not site-specific and will affect all the muscles in your body.

The problem with taking drugs to treat spasticity is that it's a short-term solution that only treats the symptom, not the underlying cause.

So how can you treat the underlying cause?

With the help of your good ol' friend neuroplasticity.

How to Permanently Reduce Spasticity

Neuroplasticity is your long-term, permanent solution to overcoming spasticity.

When a stroke damages part of the brain responsible for motor function, it decreases the number of brain cells dedicated to moving your affected limbs. Neuroplasticity comes into play by rewiring your brain and dedicating more brain cells to controlling your affected limbs.

In order for this rewiring to occur, you have to repeat your rehab exercises over and over. The more you repeat the movement, the better the spasticity will subside and movement will improve.

It's like paving new roads. The more you reinforce those new roads, the stronger they'll become.

Putting in hard work is essential.

4 Ways to Reap More Benefit from Hard Work

If spasticity is causing you pain, then using temporary solutions in the meantime can help alleviate the barriers keeping you from your rehab exercises; making more room for hard work.

There are 4 ways to maximize your benefit from hard work:

- Constraint-induced movement therapy
- Bilateral training
- Visualization
- Electrical stimulation

There's one thing these methods all have in common: *Repetition*.

No matter which option you choose, be sure to create an at-home rehabilitation regimen that utilizes a high number of repetitions.

You'll get better faster this way because it's the only way to retrain your brain to relax your spastic muscles – permanently.

If You Think You're Paralyzed – You Probably Aren't

Believing that your movement is too limited to regain any more movement is a limiting belief; and limiting beliefs will limit your recovery.

The truth is that if you think you're paralyzed, you're probably not. Not 100%.

To explain how, we need to define what 'paralysis' really means.

There are 2 types of true paralysis:

- Flaccid paralysis where muscles do not contract at all
- Spastic paralysis where muscles are so tight with spasticity that you can't move them

These forms of paralysis are very rare, and most survivors fall somewhere on the spectrum of 'hemiparesis,' which is weakness – not paralysis – in the affected side of the body.

And tiny amounts of movement are a sign that more movement can be regained.

Spasticity as a Surprising Sign of Hope

Although spasticity is unwanted and often painful, it's also a surprising sign of hope.

The appearance of spasticity (as laid out in the Brunnstrom stages of stroke recovery) means that you're *not* flaccid and there's room to improve.

All you have to do is start taking tiny steps, and slowly more movement will sneak in and spasticity will get pushed out.

But remember, it requires hard work and dedication. To get started, we recommend reading up on different methods for motivation to help propel your efforts.

Recommended reading:

- Post Stroke Side Effects Explained
- One-Sided Neglect after Stroke
- How to Reprogram Your Mind for Growth