

What Happens after a Stroke? Answers to Common Questions

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Recovering from a stroke involves many different factors. From healing the brain to navigating rehab, this article will provide all the answers you need about what happens after a stroke.

What Happens in the Hospital?

After the ambulance ride, doctors will work quickly to diagnose the stroke and provide proper treatment. If the stroke was caused by a clot, then doctors will use a clot-busting drug to dissolve it.

A whole team of experts will then work with the survivor to begin treating the stroke side effects. Patients are encouraged to perform self-care tasks like eating and getting out of bed as early as possible to minimize further loss of movement and promote independence.

During discharge, physicians will help the patient and family members plan for home arrival, decide what special equipment is needed, arrange for rehab services, and ensure that all safety measures will be in place.

What Happens to the Brain?

A stroke is a medical emergency that occurs when the supply of blood to parts of the brain is cut off, resulting in brain damage. Depending on the size and location of the stroke, different impairments will arise from the resulting brain damage.

Right-brain strokes can result in emotional changes, loss of concentration, memory loss, spatial-perceptual problems, and physical weakness or immobility on the left side of the body.

Left-brain strokes can result in compulsive behavior, language problems, and physical weakness or immobility on the right side of the body.

While brain cell damage is irreversible – regaining these functions is *absolutely possible* through the phenomenon of neuroplasticity. During neuroplasticity, the surrounding areas of the brain will take over functions of the damaged area. (More on this later.)

What Happens to the Body?

When the body moves, it's because the brain told it to. But when the brain has sustained damage after stroke, its ability to communicate to your muscles is also damaged. For some, this means you may have trouble moving the entire left side of your body (known as **hemiplegia**). For others, it may mean that you have trouble moving your left hand.

These impairments will continue to exist until a patient begins rehab (which typically begins immediately after stroke), which triggers neuroplasticity. As a patient continues to rehab, the surrounding areas of the brain will continue to get better and better at performing the desired tasks.

What About Other Side Effects?

One of the most common post stroke side effects is spasticity, which can manifest as painful muscle spasms or stiffness. Our guide to *treating spasticity after stroke* dated 2/5/2016 covers everything you need to know – *and more*. (We explain it further than most, is what we mean.)

And if you'd like a list of other common side effects, see our [post stroke side effects guide](#).

What Happens after the Hospital?

After the hospital, there are different types of rehab programs to choose from based on the severity of the post stroke side effects.

Hospital/inpatient programs provide intense treatment, typically involving more than one type of therapy (i.e. physical and speech therapy) for at least three hours a day. Nursing homes can provide daily therapy that's less intense than inpatient programs.

Outpatient programs are less involved, where patients commute to their therapy appointments. When commuting isn't an option, home-based programs bring professional therapists to the patient's home and provide therapy there.

Once professional assistance is no longer required, patients can continue rehab on their own using at-home therapy equipment and services. Since recovery can take years, at-home rehab is highly encouraged.

What Happens during Rehab?

Previously we mentioned that rehab helps remedy post stroke impairments by triggering neuroplasticity, the mechanism that heals your brain after stroke.

During neuroplasticity, new neural connections are formed when healthy areas of the brain take over for the damaged areas. Repetitive, consistent practice reinforces these new connections. **The more you repeat a movement, the stronger those new connections in your brain become.**

If you diligently repeat your exercises over and over and you do them on a consistent basis (i.e. religiously every day or every other day), then you will see results. Simply put: Focus on *repetition* and *consistency*, and you'll be in great shape.

Other important factors during rehab include goal-setting. While it sounds like a bore, have you heard about **outcome-oriented goal-setting**? It's much more enticing, and it leads to much better results!

What Will the Outcome Be?

"Because every stroke is different, every recovery will be different."

This is the standard answer that every survivor hears, which may be accompanied by news that your recovery will be limited. But you don't have to accept that reality.

If you don't think that you can achieve a full recovery, we encourage you to consider the possibility. Because your beliefs have a powerful impact on your motivation and results, and believing in something BIG will help you achieve BIG.