

Stroke Recovery Timeline

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Are you wondering what your stroke recovery timeline will look like? With so much information about recovery available, it can be hard to put the pieces together. That's why we created this overview of what your journey might look like.

Every stroke is different and therefore every recovery will be different. Time spent in each phase will vary greatly from one person to the next, but this stroke recovery timeline will help give you a general idea of what to expect.

Hospitalization

A stroke is a medical emergency, and the first phase of your stroke recovery will begin in the hospital. Depending on the severity of your stroke, your hospital stay could range from a few days to even a few months in rare cases. Factors that influence the duration of your hospital stay include: the need for surgery, the cause of your stroke, and what therapy is needed.

Once you've received the treatment you need in the hospital, you may be referred to an inpatient rehabilitation facility (where you can live short-term), a skilled nursing facility (where you can live long-term), or continue your recovery at home. Again, it all depends on the severity of your stroke, as well as your social and home situation.

For those who get to go home after the hospital, a case manager or social worker will meet with you and your family before leaving the hospital to discuss what assistance you'll need in order to care for yourself at home.

Inpatient Care

Based on your performance with therapy in the hospital, your hospital care team may recommend you continue your rehabilitation either at an inpatient rehabilitation facility or a skilled nursing facility. An inpatient rehabilitation facility is geared for patients who can participate in a minimum of three hours of therapy a day, can benefit from more than one type of therapy (like physical and speech therapy) and are planning to reintegrate into community living. Skilled nursing facilities are for those who require daily but less intensive therapy.

In either of these locations, you'll be supported by a team of trained professionals who will try to optimize your functioning and independence. Your rehab team can include any of the following: physical therapists, occupational therapists, speech therapists, social workers, psychologists, and possibly a physiatrist (a physician specializing in rehabilitation).

Despite optimal therapy, some individuals will not regain enough function to safely go home, and may stay long term in a skilled nursing or assisted living facility.

Outpatient/Home Care

Individuals with less severe deficits after stroke may be able to go home immediately after their initial hospitalization. Others with more severe deficits, lack of family help, or other challenges may go home after extending their stay in an inpatient rehabilitation facility or skilled nursing facility.

Your inpatient team will work with you before sending you home to get you the resources you'll need, such as a cane, hospital bed, or shower chair. Your physician may send someone out to your home once you're there to assess it's safety and make recommendations for additional alterations, such as grab rails, ramps, and better illumination of tricky areas.

Depending on the deficits and social situation, your provider may recommend that you continue therapy either with a therapist who visits your home or in an outpatient therapy clinic. At an outpatient therapy clinic, therapists will work with you once or twice a week to help you achieve additional independence or functionality.

Final Overview

To recap, your recovery will start in the hospital and from there you will either go to an inpatient rehab facility, skilled nursing facility, or be sent home. The goal at every stage is to help you regain independence and ultimately return home. Once there, you may continue therapy either through home visits or by going to an outpatient rehab clinic. And don't forget that you can do more therapy on your own by following online videos or using at-home rehab devices.