

The Ultimate Guide to Post Stroke Side Effects – Part 1

February 27, 2017



Because [every stroke is different](#), everyone will have different side effects.

In order to avoid confusion or panic, it's good to familiarize yourself with the most common stroke side effects so that you know what's happening if/when they happen.

And as always, if you ever experiencing something out of the ordinary or alarming, it's important to seek medical attention immediately.

Now, there are a *lot* of stroke side effects, so we broke them down into 4 parts:

1. How your body moves
2. How your body functions
3. How your body feels
4. How your emotions feel

As you can see, there's a lot of ground to cover. So grab some coffee, make yourself comfortable, and let's dig in.

Part 1: How Your Body Moves

To best understand this section, make sure that you know about [neuroplasticity](#) and the importance of [repetitive rehab exercise](#) for stroke recovery.

In a nutshell, neuroplasticity is the mechanism that rewires your brain after stroke. It's very important for your recovery – it's how you will improve your stroke deficits and get your life back.

And you can engage more neuroplasticity through repetitive practice. By repeating movements over and over and over, you strengthen the new connections in your brain.

1. Paralysis on One Side of the Body

Muscle paralysis after stroke is known as *hemiplegia*.

This is caused by your brain's inability to control your affected muscles due to brain damage from the stroke.

Treatment:

To reintroduce movement in your body, you need to participate in [passive rehab exercises](#) where you assist your affected limbs with your 'good' limbs.

As your brain starts to rewire itself ([neuroplasticity](#)) from the stimulation of the passive exercises, you can start to regain some movement and move on to [active exercises](#).

The most important thing to emphasize is [repetitive practice](#) so that your brain has the stimulation it needs to heal.

2. Weak Muscle Control on One Side of the Body

Muscle weakness after stroke is known as *hemiparesis*.

It's important to understand that both hemiparesis and hemiplegia are not problems with your muscles, they are problems with your brain.

That's where the saying "[rehab starts in the brain, not the body](#)" comes from.

Treatment:

The best treatment – by far – for improving muscle weakness is repetitive rehab exercise. The more you repeat movements using your affected muscles, the more your brain starts to relearn how to control those muscles.

3. Poor Muscle Control on Both Sides of the Body

The majority of strokes affect only one part of the brain and therefore affect one side of the body (the opposite side since each half of the brain controls the other half of the body).

However, some strokes (like brain stem strokes) can actually affect both sides of the body.

Treatment:

In these cases, rehabilitation will need to be applied to both sides of the body, not just one.

For example, instead of only working out your left side during rehab, you will need to work out both sides.

4. Balance Issues

When stroke affects your ability to control your muscles, it's common to develop balance issues.

Treatment:

[Rehab exercises](#) will help restore muscle control on your affected side, which will improve your balance overall.

However, your core plays a strong role in your balance, so adding [core exercises](#) to your regimen is greatly encouraged.

5. Weak Muscles Turning into Paralyzed Muscles

It's very important to move your muscles at least a little everyday otherwise you could develop a stroke side effects known as [learned nonuse](#).

Essentially, your brain can completely forget how to use your affected limbs if you completely neglect them. So be sure to move your muscles at least a little every day!! This is where the phrase “use it or lose it” comes from.

Treatment:

Once learned nonuse use developed, it can be reversed. Be aware that it takes lots of patience and practice.

In order to accomplish this, you can practice as much repetitive [passive exercise](#) as possible and participate in [constrain-induced movement therapy](#) if you can.

6. Tight, Stiff Muscles

[Spasticity](#) is also a very common stroke side effect that is characterized by stiffness in your affected muscles.

It's very important to understand the difference between temporary and permanent treatment for spasticity.

Temporary treatment:

To temporarily relieve spasticity, you can get Botox injections to loosen the affected muscles. However, the root cause of spasticity is in your brain, not your muscles.

So while Botox may work for a few months, the benefits will subside and you need to get another treatment because you aren't addressing the root problem.

Permanent treatment:

To permanently treat spasticity, you need to address the root problem, which is your brain's inability to communicate with those muscles.

And the best way to restore the communication between your brain and your muscles is with **repetitive rehab exercise**.

The more you exercise your affected muscles, the better your brain will get at controlling the muscles. And once the brain regains enough control, it can [relax your muscles permanently!](#)

7. Foot Drop

When you have difficulty lifting the front part of your foot up, you are dealing with a stroke side effect called [foot drop](#).

Again, it's important to understand the difference between temporary and permanent treatment.

Temporary treatment:

You can get an ankle foot orthotic (AFO) that inserts into your shoe and props your foot up. The benefit of this is immediate relief from foot drop and less danger of falling.

However, this doesn't address the root problem, which is your brain's ability to control the muscles in your lower leg and foot.

Permanent treatment:

You already know where we're going with this. The best treatment for foot drop is rehab exercise. It's the best way to regain control of your foot permanently.

We created some [foot drop exercises with pictures](#) that you can try at home.

8. Curled Toes

When your toes curl under, often in a painful manner, it's the result of spasticity in your feet. This condition is known as [curled toes](#).

Temporary treatment:

You can use AFOs to separate your toes. These AFOs are custom made to form to your feet and separate your toes. However, this doesn't address your spasticity. It only corrects the symptom.

Permanent treatment:

Rehab exercises for curled toes are the best way to get rid of curled toes for good. We have some included in our leg exercise videos in our [FlintFit DVDs](#).

If you suffer from chronic curled toes, then surgery is another available treatment option. During surgery for curled toes, your surgeon snips the tendons on the bottom of your foot that are causing the curled toes.

Be warned that the procedure is irreversible. But it's worth considering if curled toes are causing you lots of pain and interfering with your quality of life.

9. Difficulty Swallowing

Sometimes stroke impairs your control of the muscles in your throat. If you have [difficulty swallowing after stroke](#), it could be a sign that you have a condition known as *dysphagia*.

Treatment:

First off, be sure to eat soft foods and avoid eating lying down as it can lead to choking – and we don't want that!

Secondly, mindful eating is a great treatment for swallowing problems. Slow down and be very careful when you're eating.

Pour all your attention into your swallowing muscles so that you can retrain your brain how to use those muscles.

There are also medical surgeries and treatments available for dysphagia that you can ask your doctor about. But – again – they don't treat the real problem. Swallowing exercises are the best way to regain your ability to swallow naturally and for good.