

# 9 Arm Exercises for Stroke Patients with Pictures

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These 9 exercises for stroke patterns are broken up into 3 difficulty levels, so there's something for everyone to try. Read through the directions carefully so that you know how to perform each exercise correctly. Then, follow along with Barbara, OTA, for this awesome arm rehab exercise sequence!

## Level 1 Arm Exercises

*You will need:* A cane, chair, tabletop, and a full water bottle.

These arm exercises are great for stroke patients with limited mobility in their affected side of the body. They involve lots of good stretching and **passive movement**, which helps you retrain your brain and regain arm movement.

Let's get started!

## Exercise 1: Cane Leaning



Sit in chair with your legs hip width apart. Then, with a cane on your affected side, place your affected hand on the hands, and then place your unaffected hand on top.

Then, stretch and lean into your affected side. Be sure to keep your feet planted on the ground and use your non-affected side to help keep you steady.

Feel a nice stretch, then return to an upright position. Repeat 5 times.

## Exercise 2: Circle Movement



Place a water bottle on top of a table. Then, lace your fingers together and wrap both hands around a water bottle.

Then, make large circular movements with your arms. As you move around in this big circle, focus on really stretching your affected arm.

Perform 10 big, slow circles.

## Exercise 3: Straight Push



Place the water bottle on the table away from you at arm's length.

Then, interlace your fingers and rest your hand and forearm on the table. Then, stretch and reach your arm across the table to tap the water bottle. If you can, try pushing the water bottle a little farther away from you.

Then, pull your arms back down in front of you and rest your shoulders down. Put just as much attention and focus into pulling your arms back in as you do pushing them out.

Complete 10 pushes.

## Level 2 Arm Exercises

*You will need:* A tabletop and a full bottle of water.

For the level 2 exercises, you will start to isolate your affected side.



Instead of using your non-affected arm to assist your affected arm, you will start to do these movements 'actively.'

## Exercise 1: Punching Movement



Place the water bottle on the table in front of you, and then place your forearm on the table with your hand in a fist.

Then, slide your arm forward to 'punch' the water bottle. Then, pull your arm back towards you.

While you do this movement, be extra mindful not to raise your shoulder. Although your shoulder will want to help, we are working on retraining your arm, so try to isolate your arm as much as possible.

Repeat this punching movement 10 times.

## Exercise 2: Pushing Movement



Place a water bottle on the left side of the table within your range of motion. Then, hook your wrist on the outside of the bottle.

Then, use your arm to push the bottle across the table. If you can do this without moving your body, great! If you need to move your body to accomplish this task, then that's okay. You're still retraining your brain and working on regaining arm movement.

When you're done, hook your wrist on the other side of the bottle and push it back across the table.

Repeat this back and forth pushing a total of 5 times.

### Exercise 3: Unweighted Bicep Curls

If you can perform a full bicep curl, then move onto the level 3 exercises. If you have trouble curling your arm and releasing it back down, then this is a great exercise for you.



Start with your elbow on a table with your arm bent at 90 degrees. Then, curl your arm up just a little, and then release it back down just a little.

Notice how small the movement is. Start here and you will still make good progress.

Try to push your range of motion and make slightly bigger movements each time.

It's important to remember that bringing your arm down is just as important as bringing your arm up.

The upward motion activates your bicep, and the downward motion activates your tricep. Both are equally important, so focus on them equally, too.

If you have trouble curling your arm up, then tap on your bicep to activate the muscle.

Repeat slowly for a total of 5 times.

## Level 3 Arm Exercises

You will need: A water bottle and a nice comfy seat

These exercises are the most difficult, so if you can't do them don't be discouraged. You can work your way up to them!

### Exercise 1: Weighted Bicep Curl



Hold a water bottle in your affected hand and hang your arm down by your side.

Then, while keeping your elbow glued to your side, bring the bottle up to your shoulder. Then bring it back down just as slowly.

You are working your tricep when you bring your arm down, and your bicep when you bring it up; and they both need equal amounts of attention.

Complete 10 bicep curls.



## Exercise 2: Open Arm Movement



Sit comfortable and hold a water bottle with your affected hand. If it's too heavy, try the exercise with no weight and work up from there.

For the exercise, keep your elbows glued to your sides at all times.

With your arms bent at 90 degrees, open your arms up so that your forearms come out to your sides.

Really focus on squeezing your shoulder blades together when your arms are opened up the widest.

Then, move your arms back to center.

Repeat this movement 10 times.

## Exercise 3: Side Arm Raise

This is the most difficult exercise of them all, so be extra mindful about doing the movement correctly.



While sitting on the edge of your bed or couch, hold a water bottle in your affected hand and place your arm out to your side.

Then, lift the water bottle up while keeping your arm straight. Make sure that the entire movement is happening in your arm. Try not to let your shoulder hike up. If this is too difficult, try doing it without the water bottle and see if that improves your range of motion.

Complete this movement a total of 5 times and take a well-deserved break.

## Want faster results?

If you'd like to boost your results, you need to complete more reps. Repetition stimulates **neuroplasticity** in the brain and helps reconnect your mind to your muscles. This is the key to recovery.