

Don't just survive a stroke. Here is how to thrive after a stroke!

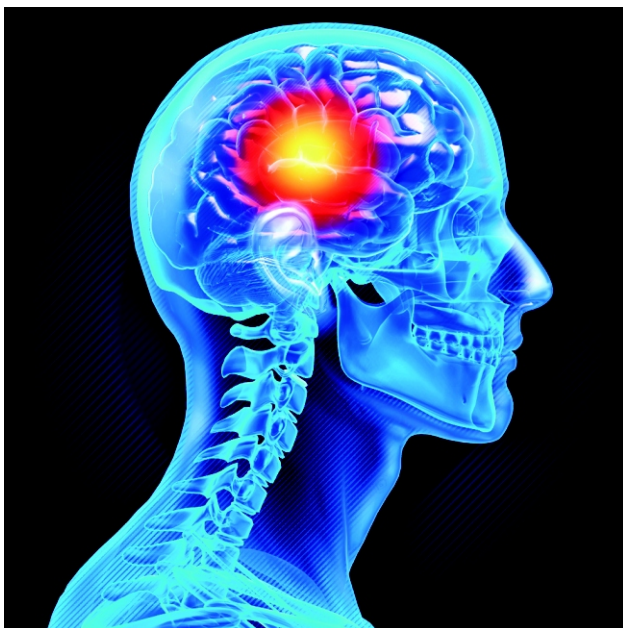
How Can a Physical Therapist Help?

How well you recover from stroke - and how long it takes to recover depend on the size and location of the stroke, how quickly you receive care, and, in some cases, other health conditions you might already have.

Rehabilitation begins very soon after your stroke, and your physical therapist is an important member of your health care team. The therapist's main goal is to help you return to your roles in the home, in the community, and at work.

After examining you and evaluating your condition, your physical therapist will develop an individualized plan to help you achieve the best quality of life you can. The plan will focus on your ability to move, any pain you might have, and ways to prevent problems that can occur after a stroke.

One of the first things your physical therapist will do is show you how to move safely from the bed to a chair. Later, the therapist will:



- Help you relearn how to walk
- Fit you with a wheelchair, if needed
- Provide training to your family and caregivers
- Train you in how to use devices that can help you keep mobile when a stroke has affected your ability to move, walk, or keep your balance: orthoses, prostheses, canes, walkers, wheelchairs perhaps even robotics.

Depending on the results of the physical therapist's evaluation, and depending on how long it's been since you had your stroke, treatment will vary.

Relearning How to Use Your Upper Body, How to Walk, and How to Do Your Daily Activities

Your physical therapist will design a training program based on tasks that you need to do every day, selecting from well-established as well as cutting-edge treatments. Physical therapist researchers are at the forefront of innovating many of these techniques:

- **Constraint-induced movement therapy** used to strengthen your weaker arm (the arm on the side of your stroke); your physical therapist will apply a mitten or a sling on your strong arm to keep you from fully using it. This "forces" you to use your weaker arm or hand to do daily tasks, which helps build your strength and control.

- **Functional electrical stimulation (FES)** - used to help move your muscles and make them more usable. For instance, your therapist might use FES to treat "hemiplegic shoulder"; where the shoulder is painful, stiff, and even "out of joint" and doesn't work as it should.
- **Motor imagery and mental practice** - used to strengthen the arms, hands, feet and legs; working with your therapist, you "rehearse" a movement without actually doing it, which stimulates the part of your brain that controls the movement.
- **Positioning** - used from the very beginning after a stroke, positioning also is important throughout rehabilitation, particularly if you're using a wheelchair or if you have shoulder problems. Positioning helps to reduce the muscle pain, spasms, slowness, and stiffness that can result from stroke. Your therapist will teach you how to safely move ("transfer") from a sitting to a standing position and how to support yourself when sitting or lying down, using foam wedges, slings, and other aids.
- **Virtual reality and interactive video games** - a computer-generated environment that provides experiences similar to real life. Using a keyboard and mouse, a special wired glove, or sensors on your body, you can practice daily tasks as your therapist helps you "re-wire" your brain and nerve connections.
- **Partial body weight support (BWS)** - combined with treadmill training to help people walk better; the physical therapist gradually decreases the amount of support as your posture, strength, balance, and coordination begin to improve.
- **Biofeedback** - used to make you aware of how your muscles work and how you might be able to better control them; your therapist attaches electrodes to your skin to provide measurements of muscle activity that are displayed on a monitor. The therapist will work with you to help you understand and change those readings.

Your needs will change over time. Even after rehabilitation is completed, your physical therapist will assess your progress, update your exercise program, help you prevent further problems, and promote the healthiest possible lifestyle.

Can this Injury or Condition be Prevented?

Some risk factors for stroke can't be changed such as family history, age, gender, race (stroke death rates are higher for African Americans even at younger ages) and previous heart attack or stroke. But there are many other stroke risks that you *can* change:

- High blood pressure
- Cigarette smoking
- High cholesterol
- Diabetes
- Carotid artery disease
- Obesity
- Physical inactivity

All of these risks can be reduced through lifestyle changes, such as regular exercise. As experts in designing exercise programs tailored for people with health problems, physical therapists can help you reduce your risks for stroke.

Pearson Physical Therapy can help you to not only survive a stroke but to thrive after a stroke. Give us a call today if you have any questions or concerns.