

Stroke Recovery Process: What Happens After Discharge?

January 22, 2018



What does the stroke recovery process involve?

Where should I go for rehab, and what will I do there?

What's the right kind of care for me?

These are popular questions that we get from stroke survivors, especially patients who recently had a stroke.

If you don't know what the next step in your stroke recovery process will be, this article will help guide you through it.

THE STROKE RECOVERY PROCESS

HOSPITAL



DO YOU REQUIRE COMPLEX MEDICAL CARE?



LONG-TERM
ACUTE HOSPITAL



CAN YOU PARTICIPATE IN 3 HOURS
OF THERAPY AT LEAST 5 DAYS A WEEK?



INPATIENT
REHAB FACILITY



SKILLED
NURSING FACILITY

Step 1: The Hospital

A stroke is a medical emergency that will hopefully lead to timely treatment in the emergency room. Doctors must work swiftly to restore proper blood flow to the brain, otherwise complications significantly worsen. Time is brain!

Rehabilitation begins as soon as stroke has been resolved. Meaning, as soon as blood flow has been restored and you are awake... your physiatrist will begin rehabilitation.

It's a really good thing!

Why Fast Action Matters:

It's best to start rehabilitation as soon as humanly possible because your brain is in a *heightened state of plasticity* immediately after injury. Your brain is rapidly trying to heal itself, and you will experience the fastest improvement during this time. While your brain is rapidly trying to heal itself, it's extra sensitive to stimulation. **This means that rehabilitation performed during this phase will be extra powerful.**

And best of all, this phase lasts for about 3 whole months.

Step 2a: Inpatient Rehabilitation Facility



Once you're discharged from the clinic, you might be sent to an Inpatient Rehabilitation Facility if you meet the following criteria:

You're a good fit for an Inpatient Rehabilitation Facility if...

- You are strong enough to participate in 3 or more hours of therapy a day, at least 5 days a week
- You're able to show signs of improvement

An Inpatient Rehabilitation Facility is a great place to capitalize on that *heightened state of plasticity* and recover quickly under the guidance of specialized professionals.

The Problem You Might Run Into:

IRF's provide great care for stroke patients. However, once a patient stops showing signs of improvement, they're discharged. Discharge can be upsetting because it can come across as a sign that recovery is over, and that further attempts to recover are pointless.

After discharge, it's important to understand that plateaus aren't permanent and EVERYONE has the potential to keep recovering once results have slowed down. So, although discharge is disappointing, don't let it stop you from continuing your recovery at home. (More on that later.)

Read: [How to Get Past Plateaus after Stroke](#) 7/27/15

Step 2b: Long-Term Acute Care Hospital



If you have a medically complex situation that requires intense medical attention, then a Long-Term Acute Care Hospital might be a good fit for you. A Long-Term Acute Care Hospital provides both rehabilitation therapies and nursing care of complex conditions.

You're a good fit for a Long-Term Acute Care Hospital if...

- You will require complex care for more than 25 days (that's what Medicare requires for coverage)
- You require a ventilator, feeding tube, dialysis, complex wound care, chemotherapy, and/or intensive mental health services

In this scenario, you would transfer from one hospital to another hospital that's better equipped to care for your specific conditions.

Step 2c: Skilled Nursing Facility



The main difference between Skilled Nursing Facilities and Long-Term Acute Care Hospitals is that physician visits are less frequent and there are usually more activity programs for patients. Skilled Nursing Facilities provide both rehabilitation services and skilled nursing services.

You're a good fit for a Skilled Nursing Facility if...

- You can't participate in 3+ hours of physical therapy a day but can benefit from regular, less intense therapy

Step 3: Outpatient Rehabilitation



Once you've been discharged from any of the Step 2 locations, you're no longer an inpatient. You've transitioned into an outpatient. This means you get to go home and travel to outpatient rehabilitation for therapy.

Outpatient rehabilitation facilities usually have state of the art equipment to provide a wide variety of care. For example, along with physical, occupational, and speech therapy, your outpatient rehab facility may also offer pool therapy, driving evaluations, electrical stimulation therapy, virtual reality, and much more.

Most patients go to outpatient therapy 1-3 times a week, or until insurance no longer covers sessions.

Step 4: Going Home



Depending on the severity of your stroke, you might have gone through all of these steps, or gone straight home.

Generally speaking...

- Patients recovering from **mild stroke** might be discharged straight home
- Patients recovering from **moderate stroke** might need to spend some time in an Inpatient Rehabilitation Facility before going home
- Patients recovering from **massive stroke** will likely need to stay in a Long-Term Acute Care Hospital or Skilled Nursing Facility; they may or may not be discharged home

If you're discharged home, you can continue to receive therapy at outpatient rehabilitation facilities. But outside of the clinic, the rest of your recovery is up to you. Luckily, you're not alone. We're here to help!

Here are some things to pay attention to:

3 Ways to Get the Most from Stroke Recovery at Home

First, you'll want to find a solid home therapy regimen to practice frequently – or daily, if you can. We recommend using [FitMi home therapy](#) to regain movement through repetitive exercises that help rewire the brain. If you want to bust through plateaus and see fast results, it's one of the best home therapy options available. One of our customers moved his arm for the first time ever after just 3 weeks of using the device!

Second, you'll want to stick with your regimen even when progress slows down – or starts to go backwards. A plateau often occurs about 3 months post-stroke, but you can keep improving by following the tips on busting through a plateau in our article on [7/27/2015](#).

But sometimes your progress goes backwards, and it's important to remain calm when this happens.

You should absolutely go to an emergency room if anything alarming happens, but small regressions are normal. Things will correct themselves as long as you stick with your regimen.

And lastly, you'll want to become a stroke recovery expert, because your recovery is now in your hands. Understanding *where* your stroke recovery process will go is different from understanding *how* it all works.

To help you out, we created a guide on [How to Become a Stroke Recovery Expert](#) [7/8/2016](#).

We hope it answers any questions you might have about your stroke recovery process.