

# What to Expect After a Stroke: A Guide for Patients and Caregivers

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Having a stroke is a life-changing event, and it's important to be prepared for these changes.

If you or a loved one have experienced a stroke, this article will help guide you through what to expect after [discharge from the hospital](#).

Here are 7 things that you must understand during recovery after stroke.

## 1. Improving mobility starts in the brain, not the body.

While the [side effects of stroke](#) vary from patient to patient, almost everyone must overcome a movement impairment.

And the best way to improve movement after stroke is by [repetitively practicing rehab exercises](#).

[Rehab exercises are different from traditional rehab exercise](#). While traditional rehab exercise strengthens your muscles, rehab exercise strengthens your *brain*.

The purpose of rehab exercise is to heal the brain by activating [neuroplasticity](#), the mechanism that your brain uses to rewire itself.

**Neuroplasticity is activated through repetition. Whatever you repeatedly practice is what your brain becomes better at.**

That's why a therapist will set up you or your loved one with stroke rehab exercises to practice at home. The more you practice those exercises, the better you get at moving.

[Having good repetition in your regimen is extremely important.](#)

## 2. Understand that progress will start to slow after 3 months, but it will never stop!

After stroke, it's important to understand the ebbing and flowing of recovery.

**Recovery does not happen in a straight line. There are many ups and downs that occur, and it's important not to be discouraged by declines in progress.**

Know that improvement will soon follow with a consistent regimen.

About 3 months after stroke, the rate of recovery may begin to slow down for you or your loved one. This is known as a plateau, and it's perfectly normal. So don't panic.

Stay calm, and know how to properly manage a plateau, which is up next.

## 3. Know what it takes to bust through plateaus and speed recovery along.

The best way to [bust through a plateau](#) is by switching up your regimen and staying challenged.

Variety is the spice of rehabilitation. And we aren't just saying that to be cheeky.

When the brain is constantly exposed to the same stimulation, it gets used to it and the rate of recovery begins to slow down.

But when the brain is exposed to new stimulation – and when that stimulation is challenging – it has to work to keep up. And that work turns into fresh gains for you or your loved one.

## 4. Be aware of eating/swallowing problems.

If you or your loved one suffer from a post stroke side effect known as [dysphagia](#), then they will have trouble swallowing their food and beverages.

Here are some tips to help with this:

- Eat soft foods as they are easier to chew
- Drink thick liquids as they move slower and help discourage choking
- Never eat while lying down as it can cause choking
- Avoid foods of varying consistencies, like a chunky soup, as it could cause choking

- Eat slowly and mindfully

Difficulty swallowing can be a very dangerous and lethal stroke side effect. If you ever have any doubts about eating safely, make sure that a caregiver is with you.

## 5. Prevent falls by equipping your home.

Due to movement impairments after stroke, most stroke survivors have [trouble with balance](#). Unfortunately, this increases the likelihood of falling, which can be devastating.

To prevent falls, there is a variety of equipment available. For example:

- [Grab rails in the shower](#)
- [Shower transfer benches](#)
- [Slip-resistant mats](#)

Your occupational therapist may also have excellent suggestions for how to adapt the home after stroke.

## 6. Know that outbursts of emotion are normal.

Both patients and caregivers should prepare themselves for the new emotions that accompany stroke.

Sometimes stroke affects the emotion center of the brain and a condition known as [emotional lability](#) can result.

**Emotional lability is characterized by random outbursts of laughter or crying, and it is often misdiagnosed.**

(Read: [How to Treat Emotional Lability After Stroke](#))

Other times, the trauma from stroke can cause [post-stroke depression](#) or [anxiety](#). To cope with these new emotions, stroke survivors should join a [support group](#).

Caregivers should also seek support from friends and family or even a support group of their own.

## 7. Never give up hope because a full recovery IS possible.

Lastly, all stroke patients and caregivers should prepare to fight for recovery. There will be many challenges ahead, and it's important to practice [persistence and resilience](#).

And if anyone tries to tell you that a full recovery is impossible, then disregard their limiting belief; otherwise you may fall for the [nocebo effect](#), where something bad becomes true simply because you believe it's true.

There are far too many success stories that begin with *"I recovered way more than they said I would."*

Those people refused to settle for someone else's glass-half-empty prediction, and you shouldn't settle either.

You are in charge of your own fate.

*“Shoot for the moon. Even if you miss, you’ll land among the stars.”* — Norman Vincent Peale

This concludes our list of things to expect after a stroke. We hope that it helps prepare you for the road to recovery.