

### **What is stroke rehabilitation?**

The goal of any stroke rehabilitation program (or "rehab") is to help you relearn the skills and abilities that were damaged or lost, and to help you regain as much independence as possible and lead a fulfilling life.

Depending on your individual limitations after stroke, rehabilitation may include exercises to strengthen your body and improve coordination, counseling to help you cope with mental and emotional issues, and training to help you learn new ways to perform daily tasks. Rehabilitation can also teach you how to organize your life and environment to compensate for any remaining disabilities. In the first few months after a stroke, you will recover some function because of your body's natural healing process, but any improvement you make after that is usually due to the hard work you put into rehabilitation. Rehabilitation is a lifetime commitment when you have had a stroke.

### **Who should participate in stroke rehabilitation?**

Everyone who suffers a stroke will receive in-hospital rehabilitation immediately after the stroke. Almost all stroke patients should participate in some form of stroke rehabilitation after they leave the hospital. If a stroke survivor has any limitations or problems in functioning that were not there before the stroke, and if doctors believe there is hope for improvement, rehabilitation can help you achieve a better outcome and quality of life.<sup>1</sup>

Although more than two thirds of stroke survivors can benefit from some kind of rehabilitation, a 2005 survey found that only 31% participated in an outpatient rehabilitation program.<sup>2</sup> Women were about 30% less likely than men to have participated in a rehabilitation program. It is not clear if this was because women were less likely to be recommended to rehabilitation by their doctors or because women were less likely to choose to take part in rehabilitation. Whatever the reason, women who survive a stroke seem to be missing out on the benefits that rehabilitation programs can provide.

### **When does rehabilitation begin?**

The first stages of stroke rehabilitation begin in hospital as soon as any life-threatening consequences of the stroke are under control. For most people the first step in stroke rehabilitation begins in the hospital by getting out of bed and resuming activities as tolerated.

After you have left the hospital, your rehabilitation may continue for months or years after your stroke, for as long as it helps you continue to improve. At first, you may spend as little as an hour a day 3 days a week to as much as 5 hours every day in some form of rehabilitation. As your condition improves, the amount of time you spend in rehabilitation and what you focus on can change.

### **Where does stroke rehabilitation take place and who is involved?**

Stroke rehabilitation can be provided in many different settings. These include rehabilitation hospitals, long-term care facilities, outpatient rehabilitation facilities, and in your home through home health agencies. The setting of your rehabilitation and which rehabilitation services you use depend on your specific needs. Once you are stable, you may need to spend some time in a specialized rehabilitation hospital or the rehabilitation unit of a normal hospital. Depending on how severe the stroke was, you will then be released to a nursing facility or back home. After this, your rehabilitation may take place in an outpatient rehabilitation center that you travel to several days a week, or in your own home.

Your stroke rehabilitation program will be planned and carried out by you, your doctor, and a team of experts on different aspects of stroke rehabilitation. Depending on your needs, a wide variety of professions may be involved in your stroke rehabilitation. [Click here](#) for a fact sheet describing the roles of the different members of a stroke rehabilitation team.

### **What are the limitations of stroke rehabilitation?**

For most stroke survivors, stroke leads to permanent changes you will have to deal with for the rest of your life. Rehabilitation cannot "cure" stroke or undo any brain damage the stroke caused, and no amount of rehabilitation can return your life to exactly the way it was before the stroke. However, with time, rehabilitation can reduce the limitations and disabilities caused by your stroke and teach you to cope with any remaining difficulties.

### What are the different kinds of stroke rehabilitation?

There are many kinds of stroke rehabilitation services to help a stroke survivor ease back into a normal life and restore their independence. The type(s) of rehabilitation you need depends on what aspects of your physical and mental health were damaged by the stroke.

The following articles go into more detail about the three major common kinds of stroke rehabilitation; click the title of any section to skip there:

- [Physical Rehabilitation](#)
- [Speech and Language Therapy](#)
- [Occupational Therapy](#)

These distinctions are not clear-cut, and many therapies to help you recover after stroke may take place in more than one rehabilitation setting.

### Choosing Rehabilitation Services

For information on how to find and choose a stroke rehabilitation program that meets your needs, see the National Stroke Association's [Guide to Choosing Stroke Rehabilitation Services](#)

### References

1. Duncan PW, Zorowitz R, Bates B, et al. Management of Adult Stroke Rehabilitation Care: A Clinical Practice Guideline. *Stroke*. September 1, 2005;36(9):e100-143.
2. Xie J. *Outpatient rehabilitation among stroke survivors - 21 states and the District of Columbia, 2005*. Atlanta, GA: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention; May 25 2007.

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