

### What is physical therapy for stroke?

Physical therapy (PT) for stroke helps restore strength, control, and coordination to the muscles affected by a stroke. It can help improve mobility issues, such as walking and balance, range of motion in your limbs, and partial paralysis or weakness on one side of the body. Physical therapy after stroke is designed to help minimize the physical problems caused by the stroke and improve your ability to move and perform everyday tasks. Physical therapy can also teach you to cope with physical limitations that may be permanent, making you more independent.

Physical therapy can also help you find exercises that are within your capabilities and ease you into a habit of regular physical activity. Getting some sort of [exercise](#) most days of the week is essential to your overall health and prevents future strokes and heart problems.

### What stroke problems can physical therapy help with?

Physical therapy can help you improve or compensate for many of the muscle, movement, and sensory problems often experienced after a stroke. Common stroke effects that physical therapy can address include:

- **Paralysis:** More than half of stroke survivors are unable to move one or more muscles on the side opposite their stroke.
- **Weakness:** Like paralysis, weakness on the side opposite the stroke is common and can cause problems with gripping objects, walking, and balancing.
- **Spasticity:** A condition in which muscles become stiff and resist stretching. Spasticity after stroke is most common in the arms, hands, and legs. This can cause pain, limited range of motion, and problems getting around.
- **Pain:** In addition to the pain caused by muscle spasms, weakness or paralysis can cause pain in other parts of the body. For example, physical therapy to improve arm strength can ease pain in an overburdened shoulder.
- **Ataxia:** Problems with the ability to coordinate movements.

- **Balance:** Many stroke survivors develop balance problems, either because one side of the body is weaker or because the stroke damaged the balance centers of the brain. Half of women will have a fall within a year after stroke. <sup>1</sup>

- **Fatigue:** Because of muscle and nerve problems, everyday tasks can require twice as much energy after a stroke. Physical therapy can teach you how to cope with fatigue and improve your endurance.

See also: [What are the long-term effects of a stroke?](#)

[Next: What does physical rehabilitation consist of?](#)

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