



Life After Stroke

Physical Therapy, Occupational Therapy

Never lose hope. Strokes are life-changing events and require intense rehabilitation to regain function.

- ▶ Function can improve many years after stroke.
- ▶ Through constant repetition, the brain can create new pathways.
- ▶ PT (physical therapy) and OT (occupational therapy) operate on the principle of **forced use**, which:
 - Pushes the affected body part to perform like it did pre-stroke.
 - Stimulates the brain and helps to restore function.
 - Increases the possibility of recovery through frequent use of the affected side.

How to help your therapists

- Work to maintain **motivation**. Enlisting support from family and friends can help.
- Communicate openly with your therapists; advise them of your goals and needs.
- Do what your therapist requests during both clinic **and** at-home therapy sessions.
- Don't cheat with mobility exercises or other strengthening activities. Shortcuts can build bad habits that are hard to break, hindering resumption of normal function.
- Don't skip your daily exercises.
- Check with your provider or therapist before initiating or changing an exercise program.

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Functional exercises help you perform everyday life activities more easily. Focus mentally when performing functional exercise; mentally taxing activity is required to stimulate brain reorganization.

- ▶ Upper extremity functional exercises (for a minimum of four hours per day) include:
 - Turning doorknobs or faucet handles
 - Lifting empty cup to improve grasping
 - Brushing teeth and hair
 - Putting coins in piggy bank
- ▶ Divide the four hours into several short sessions.
- ▶ Extend and close the hands to help reduce hand and arm spasms.
- ▶ During your functional exercise sessions:
 - Add repetitions.
 - Make movements faster and smoother.
 - Increase complexity of the task.
- ▶ Lower extremity functional exercises include (remember to practice safety):
 - Walking
 - Ascending/descending stairs or curbs
 - Riding a stationary bicycle

Note: If you have foot drop or an inability to walk without dragging your foot, ask your provider or therapist for a brace such as an AFO (ankle foot orthosis).

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