



**American
Stroke
Association.**
A division of the
American Heart Association.

EXERCISE AFTER STROKE

WHAT PATIENTS, CAREGIVERS NEED TO KNOW

Engaging in regular physical activity or exercise is one of the best things you can do while recovering from stroke. It will help you improve and return to the fullest possible level of function. The benefits of physical activity on stroke recovery are extensive.

Following a stroke, it's important to reduce sedentary time and start being as physically active as possible, even if you need assistance from others. With time, adding structured exercise will help increase health benefits further.

Given the range of potential challenges faced by stroke survivors, not every recommendation in this document will be relevant to all.

Identifying which approach is best for you requires a conversation with your health care professional and family member(s) or caregiver.



HEALTH BENEFITS

What are the potential benefits of engaging in regular physical activity after stroke?

There are several potential benefits, including:

- Improved overall stroke recovery.
- Improved physical function (*mobility, walking, balance*).
- Improved mental function (*mood, depression*).
- Reduced risk of stroke recurrence.
- Reduced risk of heart-related conditions (*for example, by reducing blood pressure, obesity*).
- Reduced risk of falls.



SAFETY

How do I know if and when it's safe to start an exercise program?

It's important that before starting an exercise program, you talk with your health care team. If getting back to exercising is your goal, make sure you communicate that. Before recommendations can be made, you should undergo a medical evaluation that might involve:

- Review of your preexisting health conditions that might affect your ability to exercise.
- Review of any new stroke-related deficits that might affect your ability to exercise.
- An exercise assessment or test.
- Review of your goals and preferences regarding your ideal exercise program.

If your health care team determines you...

Should NOT start physical activities on your own

They can suggest a supervised exercise program designed around your individual situation and needs. Supervised support from a health care professional like a physical therapist can include activities such as walking on a treadmill (with handrails) or riding a stationary bike or similar equipment.

Can start exercising on your own

They can help recommend the type and frequency of your physical activities based on your preferences and goals.



WHERE DO I START?

What if I never exercised in the past? Or what if I'm simply not ready or am nervous to start?

If you feel you're not ready to start exercising, consider joining a supervised exercise class that demonstrates correct techniques to increase your self-confidence and ability to exercise. It's normal to feel nervous about exercising after a stroke, but exercise can be done safely with the right evaluation and advice from your health care team.

How do I know what type of exercise to do and how much to do?

It's important to set your own goals to increase your current activity realistically. It's easier to sustain an exercise program if you pick activities you've done before and are likely to enjoy. Talk with your health care team before starting an exercise program and continue to consult with them about your goals.



IMPORTANCE OF YOUR CAREGIVER & SUPPORT TEAM

Your support team — family, friends, colleagues and neighbors — plays a vital role in your stroke recovery. Research shows the people around you can affect how much you exercise and how you recover from stroke.

It's also important that your caregiver encourages you to stick with an exercise program. Caregivers should exercise, as well, so they have the strength and endurance to assist you. Your health care professional may be able to provide home exercise programs for caregivers. Ask during a scheduled visit.



TYPES OF PHYSICAL ACTIVITIES

Any type of activity will provide benefits, but it's important to start at the right level.



Gait training exercises

These are beneficial when you're not quite back to your pre-stroke level of mobility and walking. This training is typically offered through physical therapy and helps improve your independence and prepare you for longer periods of physical activity.



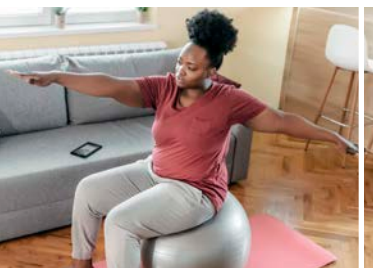
Stretching and range-of-motion exercises

These will help improve your flexibility and help with stiff or tight muscles. They can include yoga, calisthenics, Pilates, dance and tai chi.



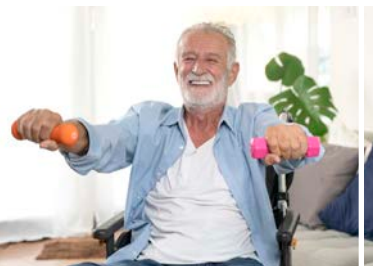
Aerobic exercise

At the start, you can incorporate moderate-intensity activities, such as brisk walking, using a stationary bike or recumbent stepper, or water aerobics, into your routine. Later you can add vigorous-intensity activities, such as running, hiking and cycling, into your exercise program.



Balance exercises

Including exercises involving your core muscles will help with balance and help reduce your risk of falling.



Strength-training exercises

Include weights, resistance bands, Pilates, yoga or tai chi when you're cleared to include them.

AFTER A STROKE

Exercise class, including counseling, increased leisure time activities

DURING RECOVERY

Moderate-intensity activity:

10 min x 4 times/week

Vigorous-intensity activity:

20 min x 2 times/week

FULLY RECOVERED

Moderate-intensity activity:

150 min/week

Vigorous-intensity activity:

75 min/week

Strength training:

2-3 times/week

Stroke survivors with mobility deficits can benefit from an exercise program supervised by a health care professional like a physical therapist. Avoid being inactive. Break up activities into three-minute intervals or standing or light exercise, if able, every 30 minutes.

Start small and increase the amount and intensity of physical activity and exercise to build endurance and strength and develop healthier habits for life.

All stroke survivors should engage in some form of physical activity that's readily accessible to them and helps them be active!