

## **Stroke Victims: Why rehabilitation makes life easier**

Mimi Jacobs

Due to advances in modern medicine, a stroke may not always be a life-threatening episode. The large majority of people who suffer from a stroke continue to live for 10 or more years.

However, stroke does often result in significant mental and physical limitations that produce a loss of function and significant reduction in the person's quality of life. These changes may also adversely affect the quality of life for caregivers and other family members.

In many cases, the results of a stroke are chronic conditions that may change over time. Rehabilitation providers, including physical, occupational and speech therapists, can teach the patient how to improve flexibility, strength, balance and endurance. These therapists can also improve patients' ability to walk, communicate and manage day-to-day life as their needs change over time. Rehabilitation is not only beneficial for the acute phase of recovery immediately following the stroke, but also helps as the patient and family adjust to any long-term effects a stroke may have.

### **Physical therapy for stroke survivors**

Physical therapists can provide a balance evaluation and training to reduce the risk of falls, a gait evaluation and training to improve a patient's ability to walk safely both indoors and outdoors. They can also put together a customized physical activity program to maximize a patient's strength and general ability to function.

### **Occupational therapy for stroke patients**

Occupational therapists focus on a person's ability to perform Activities of Daily Living (ADLs) - getting dressed, bathing, toileting and making a light meal- as well as Instrumental Activities of Daily Living (IADLs) - driving, shopping and other leisure activities. Immediately after a stroke, both the patient and caregivers may need education and training on the best way for the patient to manage these common daily tasks. Throughout the years following a stroke, a person's status may change, requiring additional training.

### **Speech therapy for stroke victims**

Speech-language pathologists (also known as speech therapists) specialize in improving a patient's ability to communicate, which can include the ability to express oneself, improving the volume and quality of one's voice, as well as comprehension of communication. Speech-language pathology services also include therapy to improve a

patient's ability to swallow without choking and prevent them from developing pneumonia.

Immediately following a stroke, rehabilitation services are available in the hospital and in a sub-acute rehabilitation hospital. However, rehabilitation services are also available in long-term care and nursing home settings, assisted living facilities, and patients' homes. In the years after stroke survival, the ability to manage day-to-day tasks and leisure activities may change. If a fall occurs, a change in medical status occurs, or if there is any decline in your loved one's ability to function, rehabilitation services are able to provide appropriate, customized treatment to improve your family member's ability to perform day-to-day tasks, participate in community activities, and improve overall quality of life.

The American Physical Therapy Association (APTA), the American Occupational Therapy Association (AOTA) and the American Speech and Hearing Association (ASHA) are all good resources to use in finding a therapist that specializes in geriatrics or stroke in your area. Also check with your insurance provider to confirm the rehabilitation coverage benefits.

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