

Stroke Education

Understanding Stroke and Stroke Recovery



A stroke results from a shortage of blood flow to the brain caused by a clot (ischemic stroke) or a rupture of a blood vessel (hemorrhagic stroke). When either of these things happens, brain cells begin to die and brain damage occurs. The brain cells most affected by the stroke do not recover. Some brain cells surrounding the damaged area of the brain may recover.

CONSEQUENCES OF A STROKE CAN INCLUDE:

- Weakness on one side of the body;
- Difficulty balancing or walking;
- Pain;
- Difficulty understanding what people are saying;
- Difficulty speaking;
- Trouble swallowing;
- Vision changes;
- Problems with your memory or solving problems.

AFTER A STROKE YOU MAY NOTICE CHANGES WITH:

- Getting dressed, bathing or eating;
- Standing, walking, climbing stairs;
- Driving;
- Getting out to socialize with family and friends;
- Your mood;
- Relationships and sexual health.

In the first three months after your stroke you will see the most recovery, but improvement may continue for 1-2 years following your stroke. Recovery happens in three ways:

1. Natural healing – similar to how a wound heals into a scar and then resolves
2. Making new connections in the brain – also called neuroplasticity, is the foundation for most of your therapy and occurs when you repeat activities to help your brain form new pathways.
3. Compensating – finding new ways of doing things like using a walker to get around or a smart phone to remind you of appointments.

Recovering from a stroke is hard and therapy will help to improve your function. You are in rehabilitation because it is important to get the most therapy as early as possible in your recovery.

YOU CAN HELP YOURSELF RECOVER FROM A STROKE:

- Move your affected arm or leg or even imagine moving it;
- Do your homework (puzzles, brain teasers, exercise program);
- Eat and brush your teeth with your affected arm, don't worry if you are messy;
- Try to do as much as you can by yourself – but remember always be safe;
- Have visitors and family sit on your affected side when they are talking to you.

Try to avoid feeling frustrated with your body – it is doing the best it can – celebrate your successes!

For more information, contact your West Park Neurological Rehabilitation Team, or consult your “My Guide for Stroke Recovery” which is available in English at <http://strokerecovery.guide>, and in Italian, Portuguese, Punjabi, and simplified Chinese at <http://strokerecovery.guide/about>.