



GENERAL STROKE INFORMATION

Stroke Rehabilitation

Stroke rehabilitation or “rehab” is a key part of stroke recovery. It can help your loved one readjust to everyday life after stroke. It can teach your loved one new ways to do things.

Why Is It Important?

Stroke damages parts of the brain that affect everyday activities, like walking and talking. Rehab can help your loved one relearn these skills.

Rehab helps your loved one with:

- Personal care activities, such as bathing, dressing, grooming and feeding
- Speech and language problems
- Interacting with others
- Memory and problem solving
- Walking and transferring, such as moving from bed to chair

What Do You Need to Know?

Rehab does not reverse the effects of stroke. Instead, rehab helps make your loved one stronger. It teaches him or her how to deal with the changes. This will help your loved one achieve the best quality of life.

What Is the Goal of Rehab?

The goal of rehab is to recover as much independence as possible. Rehab helps the body heal. It helps improve physical, mental and emotional functions. Recovery will be different for each person. Your healthcare team will assess and determine your loved one’s rehab needs.

When Does Rehab Start?

Rehab begins when your loved one is medically stable. Rehab most often begins in the hospital. It usually starts within a day or two after the stroke.

How Long Will Rehab Be Needed?

Your loved one's disabilities will determine how much rehab is needed. Most gains happen in the first few weeks or months after stroke. After that, recovery can still happen but it will be slower. For some people, stroke recovery can be a life-long process.

Who Will Make Up the Rehab Team?

The rehab team includes various healthcare members. These rehab team members will depend on your loved one's needs.

Physiatrist	Medical doctor who specializes in rehabilitation; develops a treatment plan focused on restoring function and pain control
Physical Therapist (PT)	Works to improve mobility, strength and balance; helps with moving and balance problems
Occupational Therapist (OT)	Teaches patient daily living skills, such as bathing, toileting and dressing
Rehab Nurse	Coordinates care throughout rehabilitation; manages health problems; provides education and support to patient and family
Speech Therapist	Helps restore language skills lost due to stroke; provides tips to improve swallowing problems
Recreational Therapist	Helps patient relearn activities he or she once enjoyed; teaches new activities
Psychiatrist or Psychologist	Treats problems in thinking, memory and behavior; helps patient adjust to emotional changes
Vocational Rehab Counselor	Evaluates patient's abilities to return to work; helps patient get training and job skills

Where Will Rehab Take Place?

Rehab can take place in different settings. Your healthcare team will choose the best setting for your loved one. Your loved one may receive rehab in multiple settings throughout recovery.

- **Inpatient rehabilitation units** – Patients stay in the facility and receive coordinated, intensive therapy. Stay is usually 2-3 weeks long.
- **Outpatient rehabilitation units** – Patients spend a few hours several days a week receiving therapy. Patients are medically stable and able to travel for therapy.
- **Long term care** – Patients are medically stable but require 24-hour nursing care. Includes nursing homes and skilled nursing facilities.
- **Home-based rehabilitation programs** – For patients who live at home but are unable to travel for therapy. Rehab takes place in the home.

How Do You Find Out About the Quality of Care at Rehab Facilities?

Contact the Commission on Accreditation of Rehabilitation Facilities (CARF). It accredits or gives a “seal of approval” to rehab facilities. Look for the CARF certificate of accreditation at the facilities you visit. If the facility does not have one, it does not mean it gives poor care. It is difficult to get accredited by CARF. Those facilities that have CARF accreditation are top notch. The “More Resources” section at the end of this fact sheet has contact information for CARF.

What Role Do You Play in Your Loved One’s Rehabilitation?

Rehabilitation can be a long process. This can be frustrating for your loved one. Your loved one will need encouragement. Listen to his or her feelings and offer your support.

Helpful Tips

- Attend rehab sessions as often as possible with your loved one. This will keep you informed of their progress. Ask questions and talk to the rehab team about your concerns.
- Encourage your loved one to practice the new skills he or she learns.
- Join a stroke support group to share rehab experiences with others.

Remember

- The amount of rehab depends on your loved one’s disabilities.
- Stroke recovery often is a life-long process. Your loved one needs support and encouragement from family and friends.

For more information on stroke caregiving, visit the RESCUE home page:
<http://www.rorc.research.va.gov/rescue>

More Resources

The following resources contain internet links. The location of internet pages can change. Therefore the links provided may not always work. For the most current version of this list, go to <http://www.rorc.research.va.gov/rescue/resources>. This page will be updated frequently.

Link Disclaimer: Links to information and Web sites outside of the Department of Veterans Affairs do not indicate an endorsement of products or services offered by the sites. In addition, these sites may have privacy and security policies that are inconsistent with those of VA.

Commission on Accreditation of Rehabilitation Facilities (CARF)

Web: <http://www.carf.org/public>

Phone: 1-520-325-1044

The Commission on Accreditation of Rehabilitation Facilities (CARF) accredits or gives a “seal of approval” to rehab facilities. Look for the CARF certificate of accreditation at the facilities you visit. To find an accredited facility near you, go to <http://www.carf.org/providersearch>

Internet Stroke Center

Web: <http://www.strokecenter.org/patients>

Phone: 1-314-362-3868

The Internet Stroke Center has detailed information on stroke, from diagnosis through treatment and rehabilitation.

My HealthVet (MHV)

Web: <http://www.myhealth.va.gov>

My HealthVet (MHV) provides trusted information on stroke and other health conditions. It also provides resources for stroke caregivers and tools to track your loved one’s health.

Also visit the Caregiver Assistance Center on the My HealthVet Web site. This section provides more information on caregiving.

- Go to: <http://www.myhealth.va.gov>
- Click on the button that says “Enter Here”
- Click on “Research Health” on the top bar, then “Healthy Living Centers”
- Click on “Caregiver Assistance”

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References: familydoctor.org. (2008). *Stroke Rehabilitation*. Retrieved December 15, 2008, from: <http://familydoctor.org/online/famdocen/home/common/heartdisease/recovery/151.html>. American Stroke Association. (2008). *Post-Stroke Rehabilitation*. Retrieved January 15, 2009, from: <http://www.strokeassociation.org/presenter.jhtml?identifier=1041>; National Stroke Association. (2006). *National Stroke Association's Guide to Choosing Stroke Rehabilitation Services*. Retrieved January 15, 2009, from: http://www.stroke.org/site/DocServer/Choose_Rehab.pdf?docID=1101; WebMD. (2007). *Stroke Rehabilitation: Concerns of the Caregiver*. Retrieved January 15, 2009, from: <http://www.webmd.com/stroke/tc/stroke-rehabilitation-concerns-of-the-caregiver>; Family Caregiver Alliance. (2008). Retrieved January 15, 2009, from: http://caregiver.org/caregiver/jsp/content_node.jsp?nodeid=578; Andaya, Christian. (n.d.). *Getting Involved: An Introduction to Rehabilitation for the Primary Caregiver*. Retrieved January 15, 2009, from: Caregiver.com, http://www.caregiver.com/articles/print/getting_involved.htm; National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke. (2009). *Post-Stroke Rehabilitation Fact Sheet*. Retrieved January 16, 2009, from: <http://www.ninds.nih.gov/>; Commission on Accreditation of Rehabilitation Facilities. (2009). Retrieved January 28, 2009, from: <http://www.carf.org/consumer.aspx?Content=content/about/providerlist.htm&ID=6>.



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