

Occupational and Physical Therapy's Role in Stroke Rehabilitation

Occupational Therapists (OT) and Physical therapists (PT) are part of your stroke care team. OT and PT will create a rehabilitation program that is tailored to your specific needs to help you regain function and to become as independent as possible. A rehabilitation program is not a “cure”. It cannot reverse brain damage, but it can greatly help patients achieve the best possible quality-of-life after a stroke has occurred. OT and PT serve different roles in stroke rehabilitation.

Occupational Therapy (OT)

Occupational Therapists provide a holistic approach in helping patients reach the greatest level of function and independence to achieve the best result for health improvement during stroke recovery. A holistic approach considers the complete person in the rehabilitation process: mind, body, spirit and emotion. This can include assisting patients and families in promoting health and wellbeing by minimizing stroke risk factors. The occupational therapist will evaluate the patient's level of performance with:

- **Basic activities of daily living** such as feeding, grooming, bathing, dressing and toileting, managing medication.
- **Instrumental activities of daily living** such as cooking, driving
- **Range of motion** including improving muscle strength, tone and control, and coordination.
- **Cognition skills** such as thinking, processing and interpreting visual and spatial (space) information.
- **Movement and mobility** when performing activities of daily living.

Occupational Therapy work starts with an evaluation. Based on this the OT will develop short term and long-term goals that maximize the patient's performance and independence.

Physical Therapy (PT)

A stroke can cause problems with movement. Paralysis, or loss of muscle function, is common after stroke, especially on one side of the body. Physical therapists are trained in all aspects of anatomy and physiology related to normal function, with an emphasis on movement. They can assist stroke survivors in regaining strength, coordination, balance, and control of movement.

During the initial evaluation with the physical therapist they will evaluate the stroke survivor's:

- Strength and endurance
- Range of motion
- Ability to walk and gait abnormalities
- Coordination and ability to sense one's own body (proprioception)
- Ability to plan movement and motor actions (motor sequencing)
- Defects or problems with any of the senses such as vision, hearing, taste etc.

Based on the evaluation the physical therapist will create a rehabilitation program that is based on the specific patient's needs with the goal of regaining control over motor function. During treatment the patient will practice isolated movements, and repeatedly change from one kind of movement to another. The patient will also rehearse complex movements that require more coordination and balance, such as

walking up or down stairs or moving safely between obstacles. PT rehabilitation can greatly help survivors regain the use of limbs that have been damaged by the stroke.

What can I do to get the maximum benefit from Occupational and Physical therapies?

While it is not possible to reverse brain damage, PT and OT rehabilitation will help you relearn skills that were lost when the brain was damaged and greatly improve your quality-of-life. To get the maximum benefit for rehabilitation follow these action steps:

- Show up to your appointments and be on time.
- Practice the exercises your therapist prescribes to you according to instructions.
- Discuss your goals with your team including your doctor, nurse and all your therapists
- Call you insurance company to find out what they cover and make sure you are using all the benefits they pay for.

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