

Physical Activity for Stroke Survivors

Stroke survivors experience loss of muscle tone and endurance. A physical activity program can help you improve your physical fitness. Immediately after a stroke, the first goals in rehabilitation related to exercise and physical activity are to:

- Regain voluntary movement
- Prevent complications caused by a long period of inactivity
- Perform activities of daily living
- Prevent pneumonia
- Promote mental well-being

Continued exercise training improves overall endurance, quality of life, and reduces the risk for future strokes.

Your Physical Therapist (PT) and Occupational Therapist (OT) will assist you in developing a personalized program for physical activity using recommendations from the American Heart Association and American Stroke Association.

Recommendations for exercise therapy during your hospital stay and early acute phase (convalescence)

- Walking retraining activity
- Self-care activities
- Sitting and standing activity for balance and coordination
- Range of motion exercises and neuro muscular re-education

Recommendations for inpatient and outpatient exercise therapy or “rehabilitation”

- **Aerobic** (walking, stationary bike, arm ergometry, functional activities)
 - Goal is 3-5 days per week
 - 20-60 min/session or multiple 10 minute sessions
 - RPE Borg scale target zone 11-14 (see Borg handout)
- **Strength/Endurance** (functional mobility, resistance bands, weight bearing activity, weights)
 - 2-3 days per week
 - 1-3 sets of 10-15 repetitions of 8-10 exercises
 - As tolerated with avoidance of breath holding during exercises
- **Flexibility** (stretching arms, legs, and trunk)
 - 2-3 days per week before or after aerobic or strength training
 - Hold stretches 10-30 seconds
- **Neuromuscular** (activities relating to nerves and muscles)
 - Will be integrated into your program to include balance and coordination activities in both sitting and standing.

Your PT and OT will work with you to tailor a program that works best your specific needs. It is important to develop an active lifestyle, one day at a time for continued progress!

Reference: Billinger, S. “Physical Activity and Exercise Recommendations for Stroke Survivors: A statement for Healthcare Professionals from the American Heart Association/American Stroke Association” *Stroke*. May 20, 2014.

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