



EXERCISE: WHAT PATIENTS AND FAMILIES SHOULD KNOW

The benefits of exercise are very well known. Staying active helps:

- Reduce risk of heart disease and stroke
- Reduce or manage weight
- Improve muscle strength
- Boost energy levels
- Manage stress/anxiety and depression
- Prevent bone loss

WHAT ABOUT EXERCISING AFTER A STROKE?

After a stroke, you may feel weaker, less coordinated, unsteady, more stressed, and/or depressed. You may feel that you can't enjoy as many activities with your family or loved ones. However, the benefits of daily activity even after stroke are well known:

Increased activity = improved recovery

Increased activity = lowered risk for future strokes

Increased activity = increased independence in daily activities

Increased activity = increased confidence

Increased activity = more overall benefits

WHAT KIND OF EXERCISE CAN I DO?

You have many choices but it depends on your individual needs. You can start with exercise instruction under the guidance of a physical and or occupational therapist; either can provide a specific program geared towards your specific needs. This can be done at various levels of care, whether you are in the hospital, at home, or seeing an outpatient therapist. You can also start a walking program at home or at your local gym. Again, the supervision of a skilled professional is recommended when your physician recommends exercise for you.

Here are examples you may use to increase your daily activity:

- If you use a wheelchair, propel it with your hands or feet rather than letting someone always push you
- Perform your exercises to music or while watching a TV show
- Do daily activities yourself such as your bathing and dressing routine, instead of having someone else do them for you

- Get up and move during commercials. Stretch out. Better yet, turn the TV off and go for a stroll!
- Play with the kids – it will keep your mind and body young
- Park farther away from the mall or the grocery store
- Walk up one flight of stairs instead of taking the elevator
- Go for walks in your neighborhood or your local mall with a friend or family member
- Make exercise part of your daily routine
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I CAN'T DO THAT – I AM NOT STRONG ENOUGH TO EXERCISE!

Yes, you can! Anyone can increase their activity level, no matter what that level is – whether you are in a wheelchair or going back to work full-time. You need to make it happen, because your health and well-being is important to you! Plus, you don't want to get sick again! The smallest addition to your daily activities will help you feel more in control of your own health.

HOW DO I GET STARTED?

Talk to your doctor or your physical or occupational therapist. Once you have guidance on a safe program or list of activities, talk to your family or loved ones to ask for their help. Having others support you is very important in assuming and maintaining a routine. Enlist the help of an exercise buddy if possible. Finally, look into any local community recreational programs that emphasize physical activity.

GOOD LUCK, AND GET MOVING!