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Physical Therapy Brings Motion to Life

Physical Therapy and Stroke

Like a heart attack, a stroke occurs when the blood supply to part of the brain is reduced or stopped, depriving that area of oxygen. One common cause includes blockage from a clot in blood vessels supplying the brain, or from a disease such as arteriosclerosis that has caused a narrowing of those vessels. This reduction in blood flow results in an *ischemic stroke*. Another common cause happens when blood supply is reduced by a leaking vessel in the brain, resulting in a *hemorrhagic stroke*.

As the third leading cause of death in the U.S.*, and the leading cause of serious long-term disability, stroke can result in temporary and/or permanent damage. Strokes may often cause physical problems that prevent persons from living their lives with normal function. These problems may include severely limited movement, balance, and coordination. Physical therapists, who are experts in restoring and improving human motion, play an important role not only in treating the effects of stroke but also in prevention and risk reduction.

Warning Signs of a Stroke*

- Sudden numbness or weakness of the face, arm or leg, especially on one side of the body
- Sudden confusion, trouble speaking or understanding
- Sudden trouble seeing in one or both eyes
- Sudden trouble walking, dizziness, loss of balance or coordination
- Sudden, severe headache with no known cause

If you or someone with you shows one or more of these warning signs, **immediately call 9-1-1 or your local emergency medical services (EMS)** so an ambulance can be sent for you. For early treatment it is important to make a note of the time symptoms began.

How a Physical Therapist Can Help

Prevention

Some risk factors, such as family history, age, gender, race (stroke death rates are higher for African Americans even at younger ages,) and previous heart attack or stroke, cannot be changed. However, there are many that *can* be controlled, such as high blood pressure, cigarette smoking, high blood cholesterol, diabetes, carotid artery disease, obesity, and physical inactivity.





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As experts in designing tailored exercise plans for individuals with a variety of medical conditions, physical therapists can help reduce risk factors and reverse their effects by creating an exercise program that addresses multiple conditions as well as prevention.

Rehabilitation

Recovering from a stroke depends on its size and location, how quickly you receive care, and, in some cases, other pre-existing health conditions. Rehabilitation begins very soon after your stroke, and physical therapists are an important part of the recovery team.

After an evaluation, your physical therapist will develop an individualized plan to maximize your quality of life. The plan will address your ability to move, any pain you may have, and ways to prevent problems that can occur after a stroke. The main focus is to help you return to your highest level of activity.

After rehabilitation, many stroke survivors also benefit from periodic assessments by a physical therapist to update their exercise program, help prevent further problems, and promote the healthiest possible lifestyle.

Research

Much of the current research in the field of stroke rehabilitation and recovery is being led by physical therapists. Physical therapists have discovered many innovative new treatments for stroke-related mobility issues and continue to make progress.

*American Heart Association

Find a physical therapist in your area at www.moveforwardpt.com

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