

Healing and Healthy Living

Stroke is a life changing experience. Current treatments focus on treating the condition, rather than the whole person

Although healthcare and research teams have addressed the physical implications of stroke, few initiatives have incorporated a holistic, individualized interdisciplinary perspective of post-stroke recovery and wellness care for survivors and their caregivers. The current healthcare model often leaves bewildered patients and their caregivers in a vulnerable position as they try to cope with the unfamiliar, multifaceted, and often isolating realities of

post-stroke life. Once the survivor has returned home, stroke patients and their families are often burdened by a complete restructuring of their daily lives.

Therefore, it is imperative that a consider a broader model of care is incorporated to optimize stroke recovery and wellness.

A holistic wellness approach to stroke recovery should focus on the person's

readiness to change and be individualized to their personal wants and needs.



Why Should I Change My Eating Habits?

Having a positive attitude and even making small changes to your eating habits can make a difference to your overall health. Consuming a healthy balanced diet can help your heart and body.

Plaque is a mixture of fat, calcium, cholesterol, and waste from the cells in the body. This mix can stick to the walls of the arteries, making these blood vessels narrower. When this happens, it is called atherosclerosis. Clogged or blocked arteries can stop fresh blood from reaching parts of the body, which can put a person at risk of a heart attack or stroke.

How can I eat more healthily?

Stay away from foods that are high in trans fats include:

- fried foods
- processed packaged foods
- cakes, pies, and pastries
- cookies and biscuits
- margarine or butter substitutes
- vegetable shortening
- products with partially hydrogenated oils, otherwise known as trans fats

Foods that are rich in unsaturated fats include

Unsaturated fats are mainly found in plants and fatty fish. Sources include:

- avocado
- olives
- walnuts
- some vegetable oils including sunflower and olive

- fatty fish, including trout, herring, and salmon

Eat more fruit and vegetables

- Fruit and vegetables are an important source of vitamins and minerals and you should aim to have five portions of fruit and vegetables every day.
- Eat more fiber

Foods that are high in fibre help to reduce the amount of cholesterol in your blood, so when choosing starchy foods, go for wholegrain cereals, brown rice or grains such as whole wheat couscous.



Eat healthy protein

- Eating saturated fats can raise your cholesterol. To reduce the amount of saturated fat you eat, try to eat lean cuts of meat and take the skin off poultry. You could use beans or lentils to replace some of the meat in stews and curries.
- It's a good idea to eat two portions of fish every week, especially oily fish like mackerel, sardines or salmon, as these contain omega-3 fatty acids, which can prevent blood clots and lower blood pressure.
- Vegetarian or vegan sources of protein include tofu, mycoprotein (such as Quorn), textured vegetable protein and tempeh.
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Try new ways of cooking

- Steaming, boiling and grilling are all healthier than frying, which adds extra fat.

- Fried foods should be enjoyed as occasional treats, rather than as a regular part of your diet.

Watch the salt

- Too much salt can increase your blood pressure. You should not eat more than 6g (or a teaspoon) of salt per day.
- Much of the salt we eat is 'hidden' in processed foods like ready meals, nuts, cake and processed meats.
- Avoid adding salt to food when you're cooking or at the table. Try using fresh ginger, lemon juice and chillies or dried herbs and spices to flavor food instead.

Reading labels is crucial. The FDA, has an informational page in regards to, [How to Understand and Use the Nutrition Facts Label](#). This will help guide you when making choices in the supermarket.

Exercise after Stroke

After suffering a stroke the last thing that may be on your mind is exercise. Just trying to figure out your daily tasks are taxing as it is, however, exercise is just what your brain needs. Exercise should be fun, not a task, so even light exercise 5-7 days a week will help rebuild your brain.



Once you return home, it will be crucial that you follow an exercise plan daily. It will take time to regain strength so be diligent in working hard. Make sure you work closely with your physical therapist on how you should move forward with your recovery.

How yoga can help after a stroke

There are many different types of exercise for different tastes and Yoga is one of them.

Yoga is a system of self-development that has evolved over many thousands of years since its inception in ancient contemplative societies in southern Asia.

Yoga aims to integrate mind and body. This is appropriate for survivors, as strokes have consequences for both physical and mental function. Yoga's holistic approach views health as relating to one's mental, physical and social potential, not merely the absence of disease.

Fatigue and low exercise tolerance often make it difficult for stroke survivors to participate in standard modes of exercise. But yoga can be individualized and adapted to suit most individuals despite their movement abilities. In fact, yoga can be more accessible to those seeking to keep active after stroke than other forms of exercise.

With this level of accessibility, yoga can increase confidence and promote participation in other forms of physical activity and daily activities. A study from the United States, for instance, found eight weeks of yoga improved stroke survivors' balance and reduced their fear of falling.

Here is a great video for [Wheelchair Yoga](#).

Meditation and mindfulness

Beyond movement and physical activity, yoga involves contemplative practices such as meditation. This means paying attention to breathing and body sensations while moving or keeping still.

Regular meditation has been shown to promote mindfulness, a skill for purposefully maintaining attention in the present moment in an open and accepting way. Mindfulness training has been associated with a number of benefits, including improved emotional well-being and cognitive function.



However, the current level of evidence is far from conclusive and the mechanisms underlying these benefits are yet to be clearly delineated. Some commentators have proposed that mindfulness techniques engage the brain in particular ways that strengthen parts of the brain responsible for attention, decision making, working memory, and emotional regulation.

Regardless, feeling in control and able to cope provides a sense of self-mastery, leading to better stress management and emotional well-being. Yoga can help us develop the skills necessary to remain in control of our physical and mental reactions when we face challenging situations.

Before starting yoga, stroke survivors should consult with their health professional.