



A STROKE can cause temporary or permanent paralysis on one side of the body. It can also affect balance, vision, memory, speech, and cognition, and cause other complications such as muscle spasm and pain. For these reasons, people who have experienced a stroke may have difficulty with daily activities (occupations) such as bathing, dressing, and managing a household, and with performing familiar roles (e.g., parent, spouse, employee).

Occupational therapy practitioners address the physical, cognitive, and emotional challenges brought on by a stroke, and they can help stroke survivors engage in the things they want and need to do. The following tips are from occupational therapy practitioners who work with people recovering from a stroke.

If you want to:

Be as independent as possible if one side is paralyzed.

Consider these activity tips:

- Conserve your energy by focusing on doing those things that are most important to you, and ask for assistance with the other things.
- Have things delivered to your home rather than going out to pick them up. Internet shopping conserves your energy by delivering everything from groceries to hardware to your door.
- Join a support group for stroke survivors to share ideas and resources.

Increase your safety in your home.

- Remove throw rugs and clutter.
- Use the microwave instead of the stove for cooking.
- Install plenty of night lights so you aren't walking in the dark.
- Install grab bars and use a tub bench to reduce your chances of falling in the bathroom or shower.
- Avoid stairs if possible.
- Consider a portable alert system so you can easily call for help if necessary.
- Wear sturdy, nonslip footwear, even when you get up to go to the bathroom at night.

An occupational therapy practitioner offers expertise to:

- Show you one-handed techniques for how to do things like open packages, get dressed, cut food, and use a computer.
- Provide you with adapted equipment to increase your ability to accomplish things on your own.
- Instruct your caregivers on ways to help you gain more independence in the activities you value.

- Conduct a full evaluation to identify your skills, strengths, and deficits, and create a therapy program based on your needs and preferences.
- Provide an in-home evaluation to determine your safety. The occupational therapist will observe you as you complete all of your daily activities, including dressing, bathing, cooking, etc., and make recommendations for equipment and changes to your home based on your particular needs, skills, and goals.
- Teach you and your caregivers how you can safely move from sitting to standing, get in and out of your bed, use the bathroom or the tub/shower, and perform other activities.

If you want to:

Consider these activity tips:

An occupational therapy practitioner offers expertise to:

Increase your strength and endurance.

- When possible, resist the urge to let others do things for you.
- Remember that even brief periods of activity (e.g., getting up for a glass of water) add up to increased strength.
- Try to engage in gentle exercise or stretching every day.

- Use ordinary activities that are meaningful to you to improve function, strength, and endurance. These activities could include things like gardening, pet care, cooking, and household tasks.
- Create an individualized program that helps you learn to safely use your affected arm and/or leg more effectively, and to regain strength, balance, and functional movement.

Get around in your community.

- If you are not able to drive, consider asking friends and family for rides in exchange for favors you can do for them (e.g., signing for deliveries when they aren't home).
- Look for mobility resources in your community provided for people with disabilities. These are often referred to as "paratransit services." Places of worship and grocery stores sometimes offer transportation services as well.

- Help identify services that support community mobility in your area.
- Evaluate your ability to use public transportation and paratransit services (e.g., can you walk from your home to the bus stop? Can you step up into the bus? Can you read a subway map?). Provide therapy and/or adaptations if you need assistance.
- Evaluate your readiness to drive and refer you to a driving specialist if your skills suggest that this will be an option with additional training and adaptations.
- Recommend mobility aids (walkers, canes, or wheelchairs), and the training to use them, to increase your ability to navigate safely in your community.

Adjust for problems with memory, confusion, and concentration.

- Try to create a daily routine.
- Make a list of what you need to do every day, and refer to it often.
- Put things away in designated places to make them easier to find.
- Create a plan for managing your medications.
- Get enough sleep at night and take short naps as needed to improve concentration and memory.

- Break activities into small steps to make them more manageable.
- Provide cognitive rehabilitation to help you regain as much of your memory as possible.
- Incorporate daily activities into therapy to address areas of concern (e.g., handling money, following a schedule).
- Work with you on strategies to compensate so you can participate in your favorite activities as fully as possible.

Need More Information?

If you would like to contact an occupational therapist to assist you in recovering from a stroke, ask your physician for a recommendation, or look for an occupational therapist in private clinics, hospitals, rehabilitation facilities, and skilled nursing facilities in your community. You can find additional information through the American Occupational Therapy Association at www.aota.org.

AOTA thanks Bonnie L. Kennedy, PhD, OTR/L, and Kathryn Levit, PhD, OTR/L, for their assistance with this Tip Sheet.

Occupational therapy is a skilled health, rehabilitation, and educational service that helps people across the lifespan participate in the things they want and need to do through the therapeutic use of everyday activities (occupations).

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