

Recovery After Stroke: Managing Life at Home

Managing life at home is an important part of stroke recovery. Whether your “home” is a house, apartment, assisted living facility or retirement home, you still want some independence in your everyday activities.

Stroke affects each survivor differently. To live well after stroke, you may need to make some changes in your home and daily routine. A few simple changes can help you keep up your energy level for therapy and the activities you enjoy.

Preparing to Go Home

Ask your doctor to arrange a home visit by an occupational therapist (OT), who is trained to help you manage daily activities and regain your independence.

- The OT will check your home and may suggest simple changes to make everyday living easier.
- Arrange for changes to be finished before you return home.

The OT may suggest some of the following:

- Change areas of your home to allow for a wheelchair (front door, bathrooms, or areas where you spend time).
- Move extra furniture out of the way to make room for a wheelchair or for walking with a walker or cane.
- Add or adjust lighting throughout your home to decrease glare and help you see better in low-lit areas.
- Obtain and use equipment to make getting into and out of the shower or bathtub easier.

- Keep telephones or call devices within easy reach.

Also talk to your OT about your everyday activities before you return home.

- Make a safety checklist of different situations and possible solutions.
- You may want to make a short home visit with the OT before you leave the hospital – if allowed by your health insurance company. This will help you find out what changes are needed and give you time to arrange for them to be made before you go home.

Staying Safe and Connected

- Write out emergency phone numbers in large print on index cards and keep them in handy locations all over your home.
- Arrange for people to check in with you regularly.
- Accept help with household chores such as cleaning, meals and errands. Allow family and friends to drive you places.
- Allow loved ones to support your recovery goals by going to therapy with you, helping with exercises, and playing cards or doing puzzles together.
- Encourage your friends and family to visit or call when they can.
- Plan outings with your friends when you are ready. They will be eager to see you and to celebrate your recovery.

Getting Around Safely

Forty percent (40%) of stroke survivors suffer serious falls within a year after their strokes. The following tips may help you avoid falling in your home:

- Move extra furniture out of the way, either to corners or another room.
- Clear paths to the kitchen, bedroom and bathroom.
- Move electrical cords out of pathways.
- Wear non-skid shoes and avoid slick surfaces.
- Remove loose carpets and runners in hallways and stairwells or fasten them with non-skid tape to improve traction.
- Replace thick carpeting with lower pile carpeting to make wheelchair or walker movement easier.
- Install handrails for support in going up and down stairs. Check to make sure they're securely fastened to the wall.
- Consider stair glides, stair lifts and platform lifts if you need to use the stairs many times during the day.

Cleaning Up

To make cleaning and other household chores easier:

- Use simple cleaning products such as disposable wipes and mop heads.
- Choose one multipurpose cleaning solution for most of your cleaning.
- Use smaller, lightweight containers, wheeled push carts and cleaning tools with long handles or extensions.
- Work on small areas.
- Take frequent breaks.
- Let your friends, family, neighbors, or even a maid or cleaning service do some of the work for you.
- Consider a home health aide to help you with daily chores.

Doing Laundry

Doing laundry will be less challenging if you make a few simple changes.

- Move laundry machines to a place where you can easily get to them.
- Stackable, front-loading machines may be easier to reach and take up less space.
- Use easy-to-reach, labeled detergents and laundry supplies.
- Have easy-to-read markings for wash settings.
- Use a nearby table or cart at the right height for you to sort and fold clothes.
- Use an ironing board that folds down from the wall.

Using The Bathroom

Bathrooms are usually tight places and can pose challenges. To make bathing both simple and safe, consider the following:

- Sturdy hand rails
- Grab bars in the tub or shower
- Non-slip flooring strips installed inside and outside of the tub
- Bath tub benches and toilet chairs
- Easy-to-use water control knobs with easily seen settings or long-handled levers.
- An adjustable or handheld showerhead.
- Bathing supplies that are easy to reach and use.

To make toileting safer:

- Use a cane, walker, wheelchair or grab bars to stabilize and balance yourself whenever you get on or off the toilet.
- Install a raised toilet seat or toilet seat riser to reduce the distance and difficulty in sitting down and getting up.
- Try a three-in-one commode chair with a raised seat, grab bars and a removable bucket. It can be kept near a bed or chair or used over an existing toilet with the bucket removed.
- Use disposable underpants.
- Keep a change of clothing handy in the bathroom for the unexpected.

Some bathroom sinks can be tough to use and hard to access. Faucets can be hard to turn and bathroom products hard to use. To make your time at the sink easier, think about getting some of these products:

- A one-piece faucet that has lever handles or long extensions, allowing you to turn water on and off with a fist or arm movement.
- A cut-out or roll-under sink, which allows room for your legs underneath the sink while you are sitting down – especially useful if you are in a wheelchair or are seated while washing.
- Squeeze bottles and soap pumps, which may be easier to use than original containers.
- Suction pads to hold grooming tools or bottles in place on a counter, requiring just one hand to pick up or use.
- A flip-top toothpaste tube.
- A toothbrush with a larger handle.
- An electric razor (if you shave), which may be simpler and safer to handle than a regular razor.

Ask your occupational therapist and/or physical therapist for more tips.

Making the Bedroom Safe and Comfortable

Your bedroom is a place where you should feel safe and comfortable and have a sense of privacy.

To make it safer:

- Make sure that help is easily and quickly within reach via telephone.
- Have a light switch near your bed.
- Move and reorganize clothes and personal items to make them easier to access. This may involve putting the clothes you wear most often in a place where you can easily reach them, lowering closet rods or shelves and

replacing drawer handles with ones that you can easily open.

- Use a nightlight and clear a path for easy access to the toilet at night.
- To avoid accidents at night, keep a commode chair near the bed.
- Since some accidents are unavoidable, consider placing disposable “blue pads” underneath your sheets. With cloth on one side and waterproof material on the other, blue pads can prevent bed staining. Some blue pads are disposable and others are washable and reusable.

Getting Dressed

To make dressing yourself easier:

- Avoid tight-fitting sleeves, armholes, pant legs and waistlines.
- Select clothes with fasteners in the front.
- Replace buttons, zippers and laces with Velcro fasteners.
- Speak with other stroke survivors for ideas and resources.
- Try out dressing aids (things that make dressing easier) and adaptable clothing. You can find them on Internet sites and at health supply stores.

Check out the following websites for adaptable clothing:

- ✓ <http://www.makoa.org/clothing.htm>
- ✓ <http://www.professionalfit.com/>

Taking Care in the Kitchen

To get back into your own kitchen, you may need to adjust to a small space where things can be hard to reach.

And if you have less sensitivity in your hands and arms, you must learn how to manage many sharp or hot objects that pose serious dangers in the kitchen.

To work independently and accident-free in the kitchen, plan ahead for cooking tasks.

- Consider the control buttons you use to turn your stove on and off and change the temperature from low to high. Controls at the front of the stove are easier and safer to use than the traditional back-of-the-stove controls. Also, push-button controls typically are easier to use than those that turn.
- Automatic shut-off controls can be installed for safety.
- Consider an over-the-stove mirror to help you see stovetop contents if cooking while seated.
- Keep a clear space near the stove where you can place a hot pot or pan quickly.
- Make sure you have oven mitts on hand.
- Keep a fire extinguisher nearby.
- The kitchen table should be at the right height for a wheelchair or for a chair with arms that supports your posture.

What Can Help

- Ask your doctors and therapists to help you solve everyday living issues.
- New resources, equipment and therapies are available each year. Take advantage of them to improve your quality of life.
- Continue to set new goals for your stroke recovery.
- Be creative.
- Get information on stroke recovery from National Stroke Association. Visit www.stroke.org or call 1-800-STROKES (1-800-787-6537).
- Contact your local stroke association.
- Subscribe to Stroke Smart magazine at www.stroke.org to view the latest gears and gadgets to assist you. It's free!
- Join a stroke support group. Other survivors will understand, validate your issues, and offer encouragement and ideas for managing life at home.
- Speak honestly with your family and caregivers about your home living needs. They'll be glad you did, and, together, you can often work out the best solution.

- Check out many helpful products at: <http://www.familyvillage.wisc.edu/at/adaptive-devices.html>

Professionals Who Can Help

- Occupational therapist, who helps stroke survivors manage daily activities.
- Physical therapist, who assess problems with moving, balance and coordination.

Rehabilitation is a lifetime commitment and an important part of recovering from a stroke. Through rehabilitation, you relearn basic skills such as talking, eating, dressing and walking. Rehabilitation can also improve your strength, flexibility and endurance. The goal is to regain as much independence as possible.

Remember to ask your doctor, “Where am I on my stroke recovery journey?”

Note: This fact sheet is compiled from general, publicly available medical information and should not be considered recommended treatment for any particular individual. Stroke survivors should consult their doctors about any personal medical concerns.