



## 7 STEPS TO RECOVERY

LEARN HOW TO RECLAIM YOUR LIFE

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These steps, with options for each one, can help you create a customized program so that you can overcome challenges specific to you.

## STEP 1 EXERCISE AND MOBILITY

Adding physical activity is important to your body and spirit. It helps you move, and move forward, in every way. Here's how to incorporate it into your life.

### **Set a goal**

What would you like to accomplish? Think ahead at what will make you feel rewarded and hopeful, then set a realistic goal to get you on your way.

### **Start small**

Small steps are better than big ones. By setting small steps, you won't feel overwhelmed by change and demands. Rather, you incorporate the activity into your life in such a way that it eventually becomes a habit you can't do without.

Try walking for a short period every day, or do stretching exercises twice a day. Garden, dust – just do what you can to move.

### **Be consistent**

It's better to go for a 10-minute walk 6 days a week than one 60 minute walk once a week. It's important that it becomes a habit that easily merges into your life.

### **Be creative**

Exercise can be part of your everyday activities. Try taking the stairs instead of an elevator or parking further away from the store and walking. Even carrying a few extra groceries can help.

### **Make it fun!**

Try dancing, bowling or other group activities. Exercise will become a habit if you start looking forward to it.

### **Don't give up**

Good habits take time to develop. Just keep going. Some exercise is better than none. So add a little more at a time and celebrate your successes along the way.

## STEP 2 COMMUNICATION AND LANGUAGE

Aphasia impairs speech and language. It can affect understanding, listening, speaking, reading and writing. It's worse just after a stroke. But, with these techniques, there's hope for improvement:

### Use tools to communicate

- Use pen and paper
- Write down key words
- Draw pictures or diagrams
- Point to photos, objects, maps and calendars
- Use tone of voice, facial expression, gestures and pantomime

### Remember that understanding can be difficult

- Relax, don't rush – just say one thing at a time
- Don't yell
- Don't pretend you understand
- Recap to make sure everyone understood correctly

## STEP 3 SOCIAL INTERACTION AND RECREATION

Family, friends, recreational activities, hobbies and interests – all give us a sense of purpose and self-worth.

After a stroke, you may have trouble taking on initiatives that allow you to connect with others. But make the effort. Once you do, it'll get easier and more enjoyable.

You can also work around your challenges and explore new interests.

Be sure to ask for what you need. You may be surprised by how willing family, friends – even strangers – are when it comes to lending a hand.

## STEP 4 THINKING, MEMORY AND PERCEPTION

A stroke can affect memory, attention span, understanding and perception (for instance, causing decreased awareness of one side of the body). For some, this can improve quickly. For others, it can take time. Until then, it takes putting the following techniques into practice:

- Keep activities and information as simple as possible
- Repeat information and practice skills to help you remember
- Stick to daily routine and a weekly timetable
- Keep a notebook, Day-Timer and/or calendar

## STEP 5 SUPPORT

Besides the social and recreational benefits - family, friends and survivor groups can help you recover. They might add a perspective that leads to solutions for challenges. They can find information and resources for you. They can also lend an ear and offer encouragement. It may be tempting to shut others out, but it's in your best interest to bring people in.

## STEP 6 HEALTHY LIFESTYLE

The following healthy choices can help with recovery and reduce the risk of another stroke:

*Reduce cholesterol*

*Lose weight (if necessary)*

*Limit caffeine*

*Stop smoking*

*Limit alcohol consumption*

Another key factor is to reduce stress. So, don't bottle up worries and conflicts. Share concerns with your doctor, religious leader, counselor, or other survivors at a Stroke Recovery group.

## STEP 7 NAVIGATING THE SYSTEM

Finding the right services, resources and support is crucial to your recovery. You can leverage tools, organizations and professionals - not to mention your own skills - to increase independence and quality of life.

First figure out what you want. Perhaps it's better housing or learning to use the transit system. From there, talk to your doctor, therapist, family, friends and other stroke survivors to find out how you can get it.

After Stroke

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Sincere thanks to the Stroke Recovery Association of British Columbia, an affiliate of After Stroke, a program of March of Dimes Canada, for creating this resource - your experience and support have added incredible value.

For more information on Guides to Recovering from a Stroke visit our website at [afterstroke.marchofdimes.ca](http://afterstroke.marchofdimes.ca)