Stroke

What is a stroke?

A stroke happens when the blood supply to the brain is suddenly interrupted. There are two main causes of stroke. Most commonly, an artery in the brain is blocked by a clot, stopping normal blood flow and the delivery of oxygen and nutrients to the brain area beyond (ischemic stroke). This occurs in around 80% of cases of stroke. The second cause is through a break in the wall of a blood vessel, leading to a bleed in the brain (haemorrhagic stroke). This disruption in blood flow may lead to temporary or permanent damage to the brain. The range of symptoms from a stroke may include: weakness and/or numbness of the face, arm or leg on either side of the body, loss of balance or falling, dizziness, fatigue, difficulty speaking or understanding others, difficulty thinking and remembering, blurring or reduced vision in one or both eyes, and difficulty swallowing.

Symptoms can appear alone or in combination and last for hours, days, months, or even years. If symptoms go away within 24 hours, this is usually called a transient ischemic attack (TIA). A TIA should not be ignored. Investigating the cause of a TIA and subsequent management of any risk factors may prevent a stroke. The degree of recovery and the speed of recovery from stroke varies between individuals and recovery may take many years.

How does exercise help with a stroke?

Physical activity and exercise levels are reported to be very low in stroke survivors. Once a person is affected by stroke, regular exercise and staying physically active can also help reduce the risk of further strokes and improve post-stroke recovery. Reported benefits include:

- Improved walking ability and ability to complete day-to-day activities
- Decreased number of falls and improved confidence
- Improved ability to return to leisure activities
- Improved strength, endurance and fitness
- Improved balance and coordination
- Improved flexibility
- Improved mood
- Improved alertness and thinking ability
- Lowered blood pressure and cholesterol

What type of exercise is best for a stroke?

The type of exercise or physical activity that works best for an individual with stroke will depend on the extent of their symptoms, any other medical conditions they may have such as heart problems and diabetes, their exercise preferences, and their ability to get out and about. Doing light-intensity exercise “little and often” is beneficial for people after a stroke and physical activity guidelines recommend that doing something is better than doing nothing.

Breaking up sitting time and avoiding long periods of sitting is also important. Fatigue is often reported as a barrier to exercise, but there is some evidence that exercise can help, so people with stroke, including those with fatigue, should try to find ways to participate in regular exercise or physical activity. There has been a lot of research testing a range of exercise approaches to help people with stroke at different points in the recovery process.

Always consult an Accredited Exercise Physiologist who can develop a tailored exercise plan to suit your needs.

Prepared by: *Natalie Fini* | Source: Exercise is Medicine Australia
Always seek professional advice from an Accredited Exercise Physiologist. Find one here: www.essa.org.au/find-aep