

# PHYSIOTHERAPY

STROKE IS ONE OF THE MAJOR CAUSES OF DEATH AND DISABILITY IN AUSTRALIA TODAY. PHYSIOTHERAPISTS HAVE A KEY ROLE IN THE REHABILITATION OF PEOPLE WHO HAVE HAD A STROKE, HELPING THEM RETURN TO THE HIGHEST POSSIBLE LEVEL OF PHYSICAL FUNCTION.



## WHAT IS STROKE

Oxygen and nutrients are supplied to the brain via several major blood vessels. These vessels may become blocked, or less commonly bleed, which results in an area of damaged brain tissue. This is referred to as a stroke.

## PROBLEMS CAUSED BY STROKE

Problems vary, depending on the area of the brain affected and how severely it is damaged. Some common problems include:

- Reduced control of movement and/or loss of feeling in some parts of the body.
- Difficulty walking.
- Disturbance of balance.
- Vision problems.
- Problems with speaking and/or understanding speech.
- Confusion, poor memory.
- Reduced bladder or bowel control.
- Difficulty swallowing.
- Reduced control over emotions.

## WARNING SIGNS

Sometimes, one or more of the problems previously described as caused by stroke may occur for a short period, then disappear. This is called a transient ischaemic attack or TIA. If this happens, contact your doctor immediately.

## MAJOR RISK FACTORS

One or a combination of the following factors may increase the risk of stroke:

- High blood pressure.
- Hardening and narrowing of the arteries (this occurs over long periods of time, due to a build up of fatty deposits inside the artery).
- Heart disease.
- High cholesterol diet.
- Stress.
- Smoking.
- Obesity.
- Diabetes.
- Sleep apnoea.

## REDUCING THE RISK

You can reduce the risk of stroke by:

- Regular medical checkups.
- Taking prescribed tablets as directed by your doctor.
- Giving up smoking.
- Keeping weight within average for height and age.
- Eating a well balanced diet.
- Regular exercise.
- Control of diabetes.



## HOW PHYSIOTHERAPY CAN HELP

Early treatment of stroke by a physiotherapist assists in optimal recovery. Although some improvement usually occurs in the first three months after a stroke, further recovery may continue for several years. Ongoing physiotherapy helps get the best recovery possible in the long-term.

Physiotherapists are specially trained to identify movement problems that may be caused by a stroke and can retrain the use of the arms and legs to improve important activities such as walking, balance and feeding. Physiotherapists are trained in rehabilitation and often work as a member of a rehabilitation team including doctors, occupational therapists, speech therapists and other health professionals.

## TREATMENT OPTIONS

Most people who have had strokes are initially treated in acute and rehabilitation hospitals. Later on, physiotherapy may be provided through day therapy in the community. Physiotherapists skilled in treating stroke patients also work in private practice and may treat patients in their homes. Each branch of the Australian Physiotherapy Association has a list of these physiotherapists. APA Neurological Physiotherapists have specific knowledge and expertise in the treatment of stroke.



## GENERAL

Many physiotherapists in private practice are listed in the Yellow Pages. Physiotherapists also work in public hospitals and community health centres. Check to see if a physiotherapist is a member of the APA. Members of the APA are bound by a professional Code of Ethics and have access to extensive and continuing postgraduate education programmes.

## HEALTH REBATES

You may consult a physiotherapist either directly or by referral from your medical practitioner. Most private health insurance funds offer rebates for physiotherapy treatment.

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*Move well. Stay well.*

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