FAMILIES & CAREGIVERS

Understanding Recovery & Your Caregiver Role

Denise, MS, OTR/L · Occupational Therapist

1 What Recovery Can Look Like

Stroke can change movement, feeling, vision, attention, communication, thinking, mood, energy and daily routines. Recovery differs for each person. Someone may need more help when tired, distracted or ill. A sudden new neurologic change should not be assumed to be normal recovery.

2 Your Role

Follow the current care plan and assistance level. Encourage safe participation rather than automatically doing every task for the person. Ask for hands-on training for any transfer, equipment or technique you are expected to perform.

3 Track Useful Changes

Notice what the person can do, what type of cue helps, when fatigue appears and whether a new problem is sudden or gradual. Share meaningful changes with the healthcare team.

4 Core Principle

Safety + participation + consistency. Help enough to prevent harm while preserving opportunities to practice.

5 Sudden Change Needs Urgent Help

Recovery can vary, but sudden new weakness, speech or vision change, severe imbalance or severe unexplained headache may be another stroke. Call 911 immediately, even if symptoms improve. Do not wait for a routine appointment.

6 Everyday Example — Fictional; Follow Your Care Plan

The person is slower getting dressed after a tiring morning. Prepare the supplies and use the setup taught by the therapist. Allow time and the prescribed help. Note what was difficult for the next visit. Sudden new weakness, speech or vision change needs emergency help, not a routine change in the day's plan.



Stroke Signs



Medical Review



Interview

At home

Follow your care plan.
Ask for a demonstration.
Check the help needed.

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Protecting the Weaker Arm & Shoulder

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1 Protect

Support the weaker arm when the person cannot control it well. Prevent the hand/arm from being trapped under the body, wheelchair, bedrail or bedding. Never pull the weaker arm during bed mobility or transfers and do not lift under the armpit.

2 Pain and Swelling

Report new or worsening pain, swelling, redness, skin injury or loss of movement. Do not force painful movement. If OT recommends a support, splint, positioning method or exercise, use it as taught and monitor the skin.

3 Daily Check

Look at the hand, palm and skin. Keep the hand clean and dry and check that fingernails are not pressing into the palm.

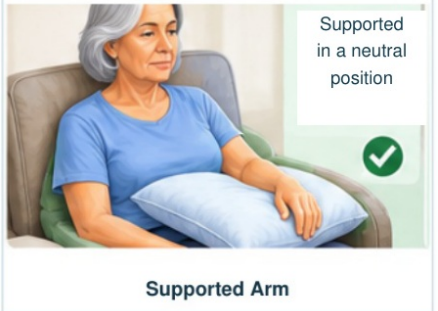
4 Do Not Use the Arm As a Handle

A weak or poorly controlled shoulder can be injured by pulling even when pain is difficult to communicate.

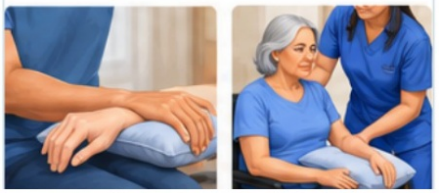
5 Everyday Example — Fictional; Follow Your Care Plan

While helping with a shirt, you notice the affected arm hanging unsupported. Pause and use the support and dressing method the therapist taught. Do not pull on the arm. Ask for another demonstration if unsure, and report new pain or swelling rather than forcing the sleeve into place.

6 Questions for My Care Team / What Helped Today

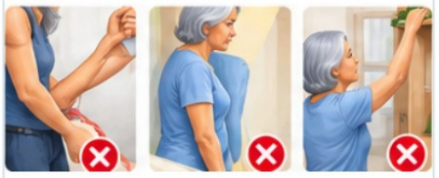


Supported Arm



Support at elbow and wrist.
Keep the arm close to the body.

Safe Handling



Unsupported / forceful positions

Function · Participation · Independence

At home

Follow your care plan.
Ask for a demonstration.
Check the help needed.

Practical Tools for Confident Stroke Care

FUNCTION
PARTICIPATION
INDEPENDENCE

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Emergency Signs & My Caregiver Action Plan

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1 BE FAST: Possible Stroke

B - Balance: sudden loss of balance or coordination. E - Eyes: sudden vision loss or change. F - Face: sudden facial droop. A - Arm: sudden weakness or numbness. S - Speech: sudden speech difficulty. T - Time: Call 911 immediately for even one new stroke warning sign, even if it improves. Do not drive yourself. Note onset or last known well without delaying help.

2 Also Watch for

A sudden severe headache with no known cause can be a stroke warning sign. Call 911.

3 My Current Care Plan

Transfer help: [ ] No hands-on help [ ] Supervision [ ] One helper [ ] Two helpers [ ] Lift / device

Mobility device / walking help: _____

Movement / weight-bearing precautions: _____

Food texture: _____

Drink thickness: _____

Meal supervision / swallowing strategies: _____

4 Contacts and Updates

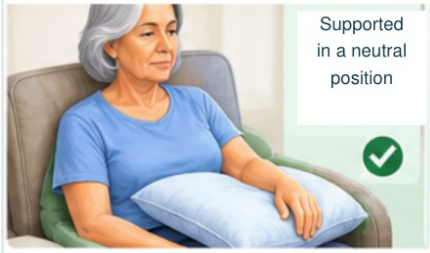
Caregiver / phone: _____

Therapy / medical contact: _____

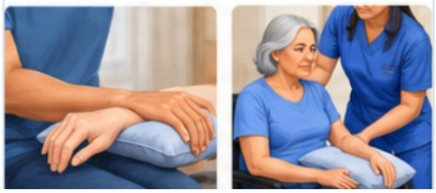
Emergency: 911. U.S. crisis support: call or text 988. Update when help, equipment, diet or precautions change.

5 Use with the Individual Plan

General education only. Follow the individual care plan and ask the treating team to demonstrate unfamiliar techniques or equipment.

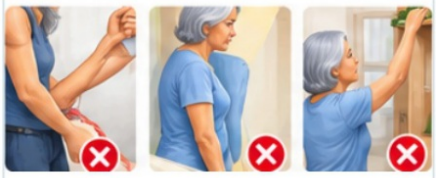


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