

Stroke Recovery Tips

www.stroke-rehab.com

USING SUSPENSION FOR THERAPY

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Many times a stroke patient is unable to perform certain movements. It may be due to complete paralysis with no initiation of muscle movement, but other times it is due to hemiparesis or weakness. It may be impossible to perform certain movements due to the weight of the limb. For example, the patient may have some shoulder movement or contraction, however, the arm may be too heavy to lift and move around especially against gravity.

A possible solution for being able to exercise weakened muscles is to support the weight of the limb allowing the patient a better chance to move and exercise various muscle groups. A helper can help support the weight of a limb, however, this can be tedious for the helper and often the helper may provide too much support or may unknowingly resist the patient's movements.

A simple way to help reduce the effect of gravity is to support the limb with a pulley system, sling, tubing, etc., and then have the patient exercise. There are therapy centers and gyms that have suspension systems, but I have also seen patients make their own simple suspension devices at home.

Some examples of the way you can use suspension systems are supporting the weight of the arm and then having the patient try to move the arm side to side or forward and back. Another example is to support the weight of the leg while the patient is lying on their back and have the patient try to move the leg side to side or bend and extend the knee. You can even suspend the patient from their core allowing a

patient to do exercises while on their hands and knees. There are also various suspension systems and harnesses that support the weight of a person so that they can practice walking. Suspension systems can be used with a patient in various positions including lying down, face down, sidelying, kneeling, sitting, and standing.

Some of the devices that can be found in rehab centers that offer suspension include:

- Lite Gait
- Solo-Step Track System
- Redcord
- Universal Exercise Unit/Spider Cage
- Second Step Gait Harness System
- RehabStation
- Imico Suspension Frame (India)
- TRX
- Swedish Arm Sling
- Levitas Sling Therapy (Czech)
- PhysioFrame (Europe)
- Biodex Gait Training
- ZeroG
- I Beam Suspension System

There are other brands and types of suspension equipment so please note that this is not an exhaustive list.

If you would like to set up a suspension system at home, there are various straps, harnesses, and exercise devices that can be used. Some are used over the door or you can have someone attach suspen-

sion devices to the ceiling or on overhead frames. The important thing to remember if you are setting up your own suspension device is that it must be securely attached and that any ropes/cords/harnesses etc. should be free of tears and in good condition. You will also need to make sure that the suspension device you are using can take the weight of the body part being used so it does not break and cause injury. If you are unsure of how to do exercises, consult with your therapist or personal trainer who is familiar with using suspension devices. Always check with your MD before starting a new exercise program as well.

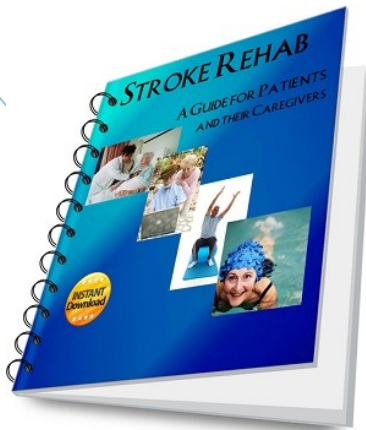
Here are some links to websites that sale suspension equipment:

- <http://redcord.myshopify.com/collections/frontpage>
- <http://www.power-systems.com/s-369-suspension-systems.aspx>
- <http://www.rehabmart.com/product/jaeco-suspension-arm-rod-and-mobile-arm-supports-7960.html>

You may also be able to find suspension equipment available on rock climbing and pediatric therapy equipment websites. You can even use equipment from your local hardware store (or look online) to make your own homemade suspension device.

Suspension devices can also be used for more advanced exercise and therapy, but it is advisable to consult with your therapist to learn these techniques.





**Stroke Rehab e-book:
A Guide for Patients and their
Caregivers**

Exercise photos included

Visit

<http://www.stroke-rehab.com/stroke-rehab-e-book.html>

Alternative Therapies

Patients will often ask me about alternative therapies or therapies used in other countries outside of the U.S. Research studies can give you valuable insight into whether a therapy may be effective or not. Unfortunately, some alternative therapies have not been researched or have had studies done that were poorly designed rendering the results somewhat useless. Other times research will be inconclusive about a therapy or have conflicting results. Sometimes, I will have patients come in and swear by an alternative therapy that has no scientific basis or proven results in research. Unless, I believe it to be something detrimental, I do not discourage them as I believe it is possible for one therapy to work for someone yet not for someone else. Therapists should use evidenced based therapy in their practice, but patients have the right to try something different or new. All therapies were new and untested at some point so I always try to keep an open mind.

Some alternative therapies have been tested in research studies, and I would like to share a synopsis of those results with you. These results can be found at www.ebrsr.com if you would like to find out more details and results from various studies.

Acupuncture—It is unclear if acupuncture improves stroke outcomes

Reiki Treatment - Has not been shown to improve stroke outcomes in research

Massage Therapy—Has been shown to reduce pain and anxiety following stroke

Chinese Herbal Medicines—Some may be beneficial after stroke

Hyperbaric Oxygen Treatment—Has not been shown to be an effective treatment for stroke

Motor Cortex Stimulation—Has shown to reduce pain in 50% of patients

Transcranial Magnetic Stimulation—may improve short term upper extremity function and mobility in chronic stroke

Transcranial Direct Current Stimulation—has been shown to improve hand function in chronic stroke

It's always a good idea to do your own research on the effectiveness of the therapy you are receiving. Sometimes therapists will use unproven techniques or alternative practitioners will recommend expensive techniques that have no evidence of being successful. Sometimes patients will go to great lengths and spend endless money on trying to find a therapy that will "cure" them. The truth is that there is no magical cure or full proof method to overcome all the effects of stroke so be wary of anyone promising you otherwise. If someone tries to convince you their product is great for stroke rehab, look for outside sources or research that backs their claims. Any company can test their own product and tweak the outcomes to their favor. This is why it is important to have unbiased testing and conclusions.



CAREGIVERS' CORNER – Attributes for Successful Caregiving

As a therapist, you meet a wide variety of caregivers. Some have more trouble with caregiving than others. Often family dynamics, living situations, and finances will affect the caregiving process. Caregivers often have different personalities and character traits. Some of the attributes that may help make the caregiving experience more positive are described below. If these behaviors don't come easy for you, you may want to consciously work on acquiring these attributes and see if it benefits your situation.

Compassion/Empathy: As a caregiver, it is important to realize what your loved one has been through and to have empathy and compassion. Try to see things from your loved one's point of view, and understand that a stroke causes injury to the brain. Your loved one will often not be able to reason as before.

Patience: Being a caregiver will most definitely try one's patience. Your loved one may make multiple requests or have many physical needs that you have to meet. If you find yourself losing your patience and lashing out, try to take a break or get help from others until you can regain your composure.

Self-Control: If you become enraged easily and do not control your behavior well, then you should examine whether the role of caregiver is right for you. Caring for someone who has had a stroke can be emotionally and physically draining. If you become flustered easily and take it out on your loved one, you may be making their situation worse rather than better.

Negotiation Skills: Caregivers often encounter situations where their loved one refuses food, medicine, bathing, etc. Being able to successfully negotiate with your loved one is important for their health and can help reduce tension. When possible, allow your loved one to be involved in decision making which helps them retain dignity.

Kindness/Civility: A kind attitude goes a long way with people. If you are yelling and using a mean tone, you will likely increase tension and strife in your

home. Your loved one will often respond to you negatively if being treated disrespectfully. A good rule of thumb is to treat them as you would like to be treated.

Ability to Forgive: You will make mistakes when caregiving, and you have to be able to forgive yourself or ask for forgiveness if needed. Worrying about something you did or retaining a feeling of guilt can be emotionally draining and should be avoided. Likewise, you need to be able to forgive your loved one for hurtful words or actions especially when the actions may be a result of their stroke/brain injury. If your loved one is abusive, set up a consult with a neuropsychologist or neuropsychiatrist to see if something can be done to help your loved one's emotional state. Sometimes individuals will have mood disorders after stroke, and it will be important to address this not only to help the stroke victim but to help you as the caregiver. Sometimes meds are needed to help regulate mood. This is sometimes hard for caregivers to accept especially when people carry the attitude of "I don't want my loved one to be on meds."

Insightfulness: Caregivers are often insightful about what their loved one needs, but a caregiver must also be insightful about his or her own needs. It is important to know when you need a break or help from others. It is not only necessary to be aware of your needs but also to be willing to ask for help or take the time needed to take care of yourself.

Adaptability—The ability to adapt or change is important in caregiving as you will be facing many changes in your life when taking on the caregiver role. You will not only experience the immediate change of becoming someone's caregiver, but you will also experience day to day situations that will present new challenges to overcome. Your loved one may become defensive if you are too inflexible, and tensions as well as stress can increase.

Check out caregiving websites for more ideas on how to manage your role as a caregiver.