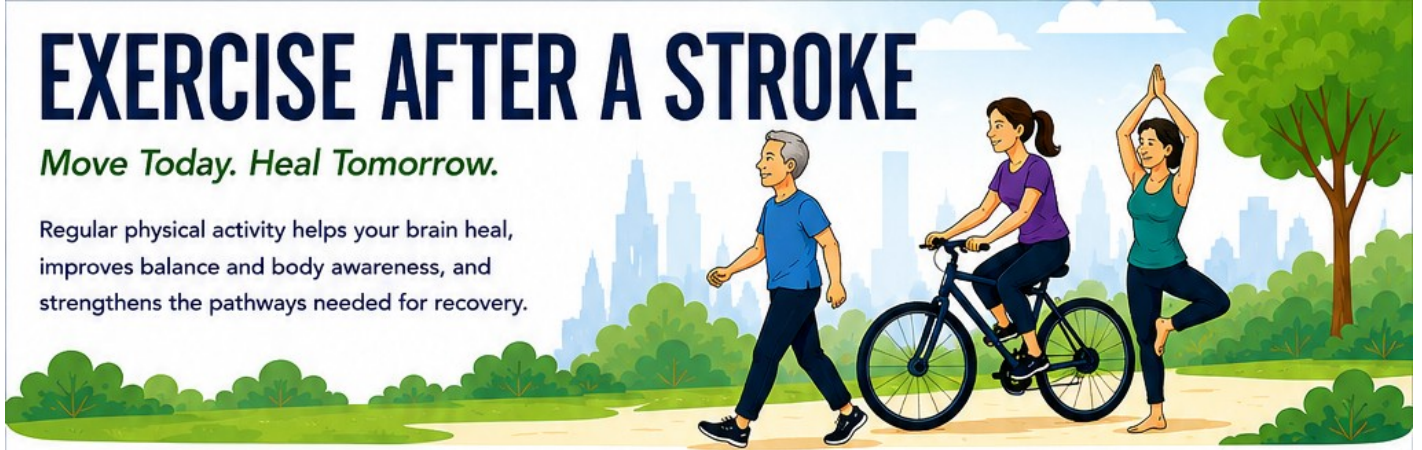


EXERCISE AFTER A STROKE

Move Today. Heal Tomorrow.

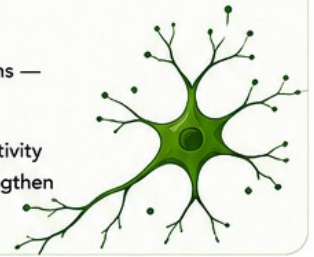
Regular physical activity helps your brain heal, improves balance and body awareness, and strengthens the pathways needed for recovery.



WHY EXERCISE MATTERS AFTER A STROKE

After a stroke, your brain has a remarkable ability to rewire itself and form new connections — a process called **neuroplasticity**.

Exercise is one of the most powerful ways to boost this healing process. Regular physical activity can help you regain balance, improve your sense of body position (proprioception), and strengthen the brain pathways needed for recovery.



HOW EXERCISE HELPS YOUR BRAIN RECOVER

When you exercise, your body releases a natural brain-healing chemical called

BDNF (Brain-Derived Neurotrophic Factor).

Think of BDNF as “fertilizer for the brain” — it helps damaged brain cells repair, grow new connections, and work better.

Research shows:

- ✓ Exercise increases BDNF levels, especially when you work at a moderate-to-vigorous intensity (enough to make you breathe harder and break a sweat).
- ✓ Exercise also improves blood flow to the brain and releases other healthy chemicals that support recovery.
- ✓ Higher-intensity exercise (such as interval training) may produce even greater BDNF increases, but moderate exercise also provides meaningful benefits.

WHAT COULD THIS MEAN FOR YOU?



Better memory and thinking



Improved attention and concentration



Better walking and balance



Improved coordination and body awareness



Increased strength and endurance



Greater independence with daily activities

WHAT TYPES OF EXERCISE ARE RECOMMENDED?



AEROBIC EXERCISE (CARDIO)

Walking, cycling, swimming, or water aerobics.



Goal: At least 3 days per week, 20–60 minutes per session.

If that feels like too much, try shorter 10–15 minute sessions repeated throughout the day.



STRENGTH TRAINING

Bands, weights, or body-weight exercises.



Goal: 2–3 days per week

- 1 set of 8–10 exercises targeting major muscle groups
- 10–15 repetitions each



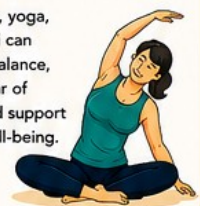
BALANCE & COORDINATION EXERCISES

- Standing on one leg
- Heel-to-toe walking
- Weight shifting
- Core strengthening
- Activities on varied surfaces



FLEXIBILITY & MIND-BODY EXERCISES

Stretching, yoga, and tai chi can improve balance, reduce fear of falling, and support overall well-being.



HOW HARD SHOULD YOU WORK?



MODERATE INTENSITY

You can talk but not sing during the activity. You should feel like you are working, but not exhausted.



VIGOROUS INTENSITY

You can only say a few words before needing to catch your breath.



HIGHER-INTENSITY INTERVALS

Short bursts of harder effort followed by recovery periods may provide additional brain benefits for some patients.

Ask your doctor or therapist if this is right for you.



Every move you make is a step toward recovery.
Small steps. Big impact.

UB|MD  NEUROLOGY





GETTING STARTED SAFELY



WORK WITH YOUR HEALTHCARE TEAM

Before starting or changing your exercise routine, talk with your doctor, physical therapist (PT), or occupational therapist (OT).

Exercise programs can often be modified to match your individual needs and abilities.



EXERCISE CAN BE ADAPTED

If weakness, balance problems, fatigue, pain, or mobility challenges make exercise difficult, ask your healthcare team about adaptive or modified exercise programs that may be appropriate for you.

Examples may include:

- Chair yoga
- Seated exercise programs
- Water aerobics
- Recumbent cycling
- Modified strength training
- Balance-focused exercise programs



START SLOWLY

Begin at a comfortable level and gradually increase.

It is normal to need rest breaks as your endurance improves.



TRACK PROGRESS

Celebrate small improvements in walking, balance, endurance, thinking, or daily activities.

Recovery often happens gradually.



RECOVERY TIPS



The best exercise is the one you'll do consistently.



Aim for at least 3 days per week.



Short sessions count. Multiple 10–15 minute exercise sessions can still provide meaningful benefits.



Recovery takes time. Improvements in balance, endurance, thinking, and daily function often occur gradually over weeks to months.



Focus on progress, not perfection. Small improvements add up.



Every movement counts. Some activity is almost always better than none.



STOP EXERCISING AND SEEK MEDICAL CARE IF YOU EXPERIENCE:



Sudden weakness or numbness



New trouble speaking or understanding speech



New vision changes



Severe dizziness or loss of balance



Chest pain or shortness of breath



Fainting or passing out



Severe headache unlike your usual headaches

When in doubt, contact your healthcare provider.



YOU ARE NOT ALONE

Ask your healthcare team about community resources, support groups, and exercise programs for stroke survivors. Support can help you stay motivated and confident on your recovery journey.



Every move you make is a step toward recovery.
Small steps. Big impact.



This handout is for educational purposes only and does not replace professional medical advice. Always consult your healthcare provider before beginning or changing any exercise program.