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## What is a Stroke?

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A stroke happens when blood flow to a part of the brain is interrupted or blocked. This can be due to a bleed or haemorrhage or a clot in a blood vessel. Once a stroke has occurred, some brain cells die and others are damaged. Damaged cells may recover, however, once a part of the brain has died, it cannot regain its function. The amount of function lost depends on how badly that part of the brain is affected by the stroke.

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## What is Physiotherapy?

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Physiotherapy is concerned with assessing, treating and preventing human movement disorders, restoring function in adults and children with physical impairment, to enable them to achieve the highest possible level of independence in their lives; preventing recurring injuries and disability in the workplace, at home, or during recreational activities; promoting community health for all age groups.

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## How can physiotherapy help?

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Physiotherapy, following a stroke aims to promote recovery of the affected side and to obtain maximal independence in functional tasks such as turning in bed, getting in and out of bed, transfers, walking, climbing stairs, etc, through practising controlled movement.

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## Problems associated with a stroke

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As a general rule a stroke results in difficulty in controlling movements of one side of the body. The patient may be completely paralysed or may have some movement present on the affected side. The paralysis can either be flaccid (floppy) or spastic (tight/stiff). Due to this paralysis, balance is also affected and the patient is unable to perform activities of daily life effectively. Other problems that can occur are: vision, concentration, memory, emotion and bladder and bowel problems.

The stroke patient can also experience problems with speech making understanding very difficult. Therefore, patience is required when dealing with these patients. The patient can also experience problems with swallowing, which makes feeding difficult.

Although strokes are associated with older people, younger people are also affected.

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## Assessment:

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On the first visit to the physiotherapist, the patient will be assessed to identify the main problems. This assessment will help the physiotherapist plan an effective treatment program. The assessment is an on-going process where short and long term goals will be discussed. The previous lifestyle of the patient as well as their home environment will be taken into consideration.

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## Treatment

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In the early stages of a stroke the physiotherapist helps the patient turn in bed, prevents chest complication, moves the affected side and helps the patient to be positioned correctly.

Once the patient is ready for active rehabilitation the physiotherapist treatment is focused on:

- Improving balance in sitting and standing so that the patients are able to perform activities of daily life effectively.
- To decrease the stiffness in the muscle by practising controlled movement and encouraging weight bearing on the affected side.
- To encourage movement of the unaffected side to ensure that both sides of the body is used. This will encourage recovery of balance and movement.
- Moving the affected side so that stiffness at the joint is prevented.
- To teach the patient how to walk.

- Advice is given to the family and caregivers about positioning of the patient, how to handle the patient at home to prevent injury to the stroke patient as well as the family or caregiver and how to prevent complications related to strokes.
- A home exercise program is given to the patient and has to be performed regularly to promote recovery. The families are caregivers and are encouraged to motivate the affected person and must ensure that the home exercises are being performed.
- The use of aids such as wheelchairs, a stick or a splint may be needed to reach or improve functional independence, especially when outdoors. The physiotherapist can prescribe these aids.

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## Where do physiotherapists work?

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Physiotherapists work in the community, visiting people in their homes, in hospitals, day care centres and in private practice. Patients can be seen as an outpatient where they come in for physiotherapy and go home after treatment has been completed. They work as part of the health care team, which may include doctors, nurses, occupational therapists, speech and language therapists and social workers. Communication between the team and caregivers plays an important part in the rehabilitation of a stroke patient.

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## Conclusion:

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The physiotherapist will help the patient achieve their maximal independence but it must be understood that the patient may not recover completely depending on how severe the stroke is. It is emphasised that the physiotherapist cannot reverse this damage but encourages maximal potential recovery.

**THERE IS HOPE AFTER STROKE**

and

**STROKE AID**

is here to help you cope

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### Become a member

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Complete the form below, and post it together with membership fees to:  
Stroke Aid, PO Box 51283, Raedene,  
Johannesburg 2124

Annual affiliation fee R40  (Not attending Paterson Park,  
living elsewhere in SA or from a neighbouring country)

Paterson Park Support Group R40  per month  
(includes coffee/tea, refreshments)

You will receive a regular newsletter of events

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Residential Address: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ Code \_\_\_\_\_

Postal Address \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ Code: \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone: (h) \_\_\_\_\_ (b) \_\_\_\_\_

Cell: \_\_\_\_\_ e-mail \_\_\_\_\_

Referred by: \_\_\_\_\_

1. Have you suffered from a stroke? Yes/No

2. Are you a family member? Yes/No

3. Are you a professional?

Yes/No

Please state profession \_\_\_\_\_

4. Are you a volunteer? Yes/No

5. Next of kin \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ Code: \_\_\_\_\_

6. Doctor: \_\_\_\_\_

Tel: (1) \_\_\_\_\_ (2) \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

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### Specialised Equipment

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#### Independent Living Centre

(Equipment & Information - disability discs for cars)

Tel: 011 482 5474/5

#### Rand Medical Supplies

(Incorporating left-hand shop)

Tel: 011 789 2203

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### Further information:

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#### Stroke Aid

PBO 930018543

Tel: 011 728 2292

Fax: 086 666 8154

P O Box 51283 Raedene

Johannesburg

2124

[www.strokeaid.org.za](http://www.strokeaid.org.za)

e-mail: [info@strokeaid.org.za](mailto:info@strokeaid.org.za)



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**STROKE AID**

(Johannesburg)

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**PHYSIOTHERAPY**

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**AND THE  
STROKE PATIENT**

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