

# Exercise after Stroke



## *Information Guide for people with Acquired Brain Injury and their families and friends*

Exercise plays a vital role in both stroke prevention and recovery. Even if your mobility is restricted, you WILL be able to carry out some form of exercise to improve your overall well-being. This leaflet explains how exercise can improve your health, suggests some types of exercise and lists a variety of relevant organisations and resources to help you get active.

### What are the benefits of exercise post-stroke?

Exercise has a number of benefits for your physical and mental health. Regular exercise may help to:

- Reduce the risk of further stroke
- Prevent falls
- Reduce other complications associated with inactivity such as osteoporosis, diabetes type 2, coronary heart disease, some forms of cancer
- Keep your heart and muscles strong
- Improve your quality of life
- Improve your mood
- Increase your energy levels
- Improve your body image and sleep

### What Type of Exercise Should I do?

You can choose any form of exercise as long as the activity increases your heart rate, makes you feel warm and gets you a little out of breath. This could include any form of physical activity from taking a class, to making small changes to your lifestyle. Here are some examples of activities you could try:

- Swimming
- Stationary exercise bike
- Going to the gym
- Taking an aqua or adapted aerobic class
- Yoga or Pilates
- Exercise DVD
- Wii Fit Balance Platform

We will provide you with a home exercise program that you can do in the comfort in your own home if none of the above suit you.

## Exercise after stroke

### How much should I exercise each week?

Adults should aim to do at least 20 minutes of exercise five or more times a week. You don't have to do all 20 minutes at once. This can be broken up into smaller blocks of time throughout the day as stated in your home-exercise programme.

You'll benefit more from doing regular gentle exercise for a good length of time, than exercising very vigorously for a short length of time or infrequently. If you are aiming to build up your fitness levels, ideally you should begin by doing lighter exercise and gradually over time increase the intensity. You should pace yourself and balance strenuous exercise with rest days. Always stop exercise if you experience any pain, dizziness, nausea or light-headedness.

Before starting to exercise you should speak to your doctor and physiotherapist to ensure it is safe to exercise alone. Within your home-exercise programme you must always include the following:

- a. Warm up
- b. Cool down
- c. Stretch out your muscles at the end

This will be included and explained in your home-exercise programme.

### When should I exercise?

You should listen to your body and decide what time suits you. In order to ensure you keep active for the future it is best to fit activities into your daily routine. Try not exercise within 2 hours following your main meal.

### How can I make exercise enjoyable?

To help you stay committed to exercising it is important you enjoy it. You may wish to do the following:

- Try something new – perhaps you've always wanted to do a Pilates class.
- Get an exercise partner – see if a friend or family member can join you and you can encourage each other.
- Exercise to music – play some music you enjoy and the time will soon pass.

## Resources and Organisations

**Irish Heart Foundation** – [www.irishheart.ie](http://www.irishheart.ie): The Irish Heart Foundation is the national charity fighting stroke and heart disease. This provides useful information about stroke and exercise.

**Stroke Action** – [www.stroke.ie](http://www.stroke.ie): F.A.S.T. campaign to increase awareness of stroke symptoms

**American Stroke Association** – [www.strokeassociation.org](http://www.strokeassociation.org): Provides excellent information and testimonials.

**The Stroke Association** – [www.stroke.org.uk](http://www.stroke.org.uk): The Stroke Association's mission is to prevent strokes, and reduce their effect through providing services, campaigning, education and research.

**Different Strokes** - [www.differentstrokes.co.uk](http://www.differentstrokes.co.uk): A support group of younger stroke survivors.

**Dublin City Council** – [www.dublincity.ie](http://www.dublincity.ie): A list of all council leisure centres within the Dublin region.

**Go for Life** – [www.ageandopportunity.ie](http://www.ageandopportunity.ie): The national program for sports and physical activity for older people.

**Gyms.ie** – [www.gyms.ie](http://www.gyms.ie): Irish Fitness Directory to find gyms and leisure centres nationwide.

**Cois Ceim Dance** - [//www.coisceim.com](http://www.coisceim.com): Find all different dance classes for 40 years +.

**ICSP** - [www.iscp.ie](http://www.iscp.ie): The Irish Society of Chartered Physiotherapists.