# Stroke Recovery at Home: A National Practice Module

Supporting stroke recovery and preventing another stroke at home.

> **Why this module matters.** More than 795,000 Americans have a stroke each year, and about one in four of those strokes is a repeat stroke. Recovery and prevention both happen largely at home.

## About this module

This module gives teams a shared, evidence-based approach to supporting stroke recovery and preventing another stroke at home. It draws on current federal rules and national guidance, and it ends with a checklist that agencies, clinicians, and families anywhere in the United States can adopt.

| Item | Details |
|---|---|
| Who it is for | Family caregivers, home care aides, nurses, and therapists |
| Format | 6 units, case scenarios, a knowledge check, and a national checklist |
| Time | About 1.5 hours |
| How to use it | Caregivers use Units 3 to 6. Clinicians and agencies use all units. |

### Learning objectives

After completing this module, learners will be able to:

1. Describe stroke nationally.
2. Understand rehabilitation options.
3. Help prevent another stroke.
4. Provide safe daily care.
5. Communicate with a person with aphasia.
6. Support mood and the caregiver.

> **Scope.** Aides and family caregivers observe, support, and report. Clinical assessments, medication changes, and treatment decisions belong to licensed clinicians. Follow your state scope-of-practice rules and agency policies.

## Unit 1. The national picture

| Measure | Figure | Source |
|---|---|---|
| Strokes each year in the U.S. | More than 795,000 | CDC |
| First or new strokes | About 610,000 | CDC |
| Recurrent strokes | About 185,000 a year (the rest) | CDC (calculated) |
| Share of cardiovascular deaths from stroke | 1 in 6 (17.5%, 2022) | CDC |
| Impact | A leading cause of serious long-term disability | CDC |

About one in four strokes happens to someone who has had a stroke before, so preventing another stroke is a central goal of home care.

## Unit 2. Rehabilitation after stroke

| Setting | What it offers |
|---|---|
| Inpatient rehabilitation facility | Intensive therapy, usually 3 hours a day, for people who can take part |
| Skilled nursing facility | Less intensive therapy and nursing care |
| Home health | Therapy and nursing at home for homebound people |
| Outpatient therapy | Physical, occupational, and speech therapy visits |

Recovery is often fastest in the first months but can continue for much longer. Daily practice of therapy exercises at home makes a difference.

## Unit 3. Preventing another stroke

| Risk factor | What helps |
|---|---|
| High blood pressure | Medicines daily; home readings as directed |
| Atrial fibrillation | Blood thinners as prescribed; report bleeding or falls |
| Cholesterol | Statins or other medicines as prescribed |
| Diabetes | Blood sugar control (see the Diabetes module) |
| Smoking and alcohol | Quit smoking; limit alcohol |
| Activity and diet | Regular movement as able; less salt; more fruits and vegetables |
| Medicines | Take antiplatelet or other prevention medicines every day as prescribed |

**BE FAST.** Call 911 for any new stroke sign: Balance loss, Eyes (vision change), Face drooping, Arm weakness, Speech difficulty. Time matters: note when symptoms started.

## Unit 4. Daily care and safety

| Need | How to help |
|---|---|
| Weakness on one side | Approach and place items on the stronger side unless therapists advise otherwise; protect the weak arm |
| Falls | Use prescribed devices; clear paths; supervised walking |
| Swallowing | Follow the speech therapist's texture advice; sit upright |
| Skin | Reposition; check pressure areas |
| Bladder and bowel | Scheduled toileting |
| Neglect of one side | Remind gently to look and turn toward the affected side |

## Unit 5. Communication after stroke

Aphasia affects speaking, understanding, reading, or writing. It does not affect intelligence.

- Speak slowly in short sentences; do not shout.
- Give time to answer; do not finish sentences unless asked.
- Use yes or no questions, gestures, pictures, and writing.
- Reduce background noise.
- Ask the speech therapist for a communication plan.

## Unit 6. Mood and the caregiver

- Depression is common after stroke and slows recovery. Report sadness, withdrawal, or hopelessness.
- Emotions may change quickly, with sudden crying or laughing; this can be part of the stroke.
- Caregivers need respite, training, and support. Use the Caregiver Wellness module.

## Case scenarios

### Case 1. Blood pressure readings

Mr. M's home readings are often above 160 since he stopped a medicine he "didn't like."

- What is the risk?
- What should happen?

*Discussion:* Higher risk of another stroke. Report to the clinician the same day; never stop medicines without advice.

### Case 2. Frustrated with words

Mrs. N cannot find words and becomes upset.

- How can caregivers help?

*Discussion:* Be patient, use yes or no questions and pictures, reduce noise, and follow the speech therapist's plan.

## Knowledge check

1. How many strokes happen in the U.S. each year? *(More than 795,000)*
2. What does BE FAST stand for? *(Balance, Eyes, Face, Arm, Speech, Time)*
3. Name three ways to prevent another stroke. *(Blood pressure control, medicines, quitting smoking, diabetes control, activity)*
4. Does aphasia affect intelligence? *(No)*
5. Why report low mood after stroke? *(Depression is common and slows recovery)*

# National Stroke Recovery at Home Checklist

This checklist turns national stroke prevention and recovery practice into one tool for families, agencies, and clinicians. The “National basis” column shows where each item comes from. Adapt it to your state rules and policies.

| Name or ID | Date | Completed by and role |
|---|---|---|
| Agency or organization | Reviewed by | Next review date |

## A. Prevent another stroke

| Action | National basis | Done | Notes |
|---|---|---|---|
| Blood pressure goal and home readings in the plan | National stroke prevention guidance | ☐ | |
| Prevention medicines taken daily | National stroke prevention guidance | ☐ | |
| Diabetes, cholesterol, and smoking addressed | National stroke prevention guidance | ☐ | |
| Everyone knows BE FAST and calls 911 | CDC | ☐ | |

## B. Recovery

| Action | National basis | Done | Notes |
|---|---|---|---|
| Rehabilitation setting and therapy plan in place | Medicare; best practice | ☐ | |
| Home exercise program practiced daily | PT and OT plan | ☐ | |
| Swallowing plan followed | SLP plan | ☐ | |
| Communication plan for aphasia | SLP plan | ☐ | |

## C. Safety and support

| Action | National basis | Done | Notes |
|---|---|---|---|
| Fall prevention plan | CDC STEADI | ☐ | |
| Skin and continence care | NPIAP; best practice | ☐ | |
| Mood monitored; depression reported | Best practice | ☐ | |
| Caregiver training and respite | Medicare caregiver training services; NFCSP | ☐ | |

| Completed by: signature | Printed name and title | Date |
|---|---|---|

| Reviewed by: signature | Printed name and title | Date |
|---|---|---|

## Sources and further reading

CDC: Stroke Facts (cdc.gov)

CDC STEADI Pocket Guide (cdc.gov)

Rural Health Information Hub: Caregiver Training Services (ruralhealthinfo.org)

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