Light Activity Can Help Stroke Survivors Improve Physical Function

Strolling, housekeeping and light gardening are some ways stroke survivors can improve functional ability.

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A stroke can lead to disability in older adults. But survivors of this cerebrovascular health event who engage in even light physical activity are more likely to see improvements in their everyday living, suggest new findings published in the American Journal of Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation, reports the University of Illinois News Bureau.

For the study, researchers at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign used accelerometers to determine daily physical activity in 30 stroke survivors for a week. Scientists assessed participants on how much they moved and how well they performed routine physical tasks.

Researchers used two methods to check individuals' physical abilities. The Short Physical Performance Battery calculated individuals' balance, walking, speed and lower-limb endurance and the Late-Life Function and Disability Instrument allowed participants to self-report how difficult it was to perform daily tasks, such as entering and exiting a car or pouring water from a heavy pitcher.

Findings showed that survivors who engaged in an adequate amount of light physical activity, such as leisure walking, housekeeping and light gardening, were less likely to report physical limitations compared with those who were inactive.

Scientists noted that stroke survivors also logged only about seven minutes of moderate to vigorous activity daily but were more likely to accumulate more than three hours of light physical activity every day.

"Our findings are preliminary but suggest that—in addition to moderate to vigorous physical activity—those daily routines that keep us on our feet and physically engaged in lighter tasks also contribute to better physical functioning in stroke survivors," said lead researcher Neha Gothe, PhD, a professor of kinesiology and community health at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.

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