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LEISURE FOLLOWING STROKE

Leisure is an important part of life. Leisure time if used wisely can provide stimulation, challenge, enjoyment, opportunities to develop new skills, friendships, opportunities to gain personal satisfaction, acceptance and good health.(2) Following stroke you may have some difficulty getting involved in leisure activities for a variety of reasons:

1. Your income now places limits on what you are able to do (eg no longer able to go out to restaurants or attend the movies).
2. Lack of confidence in you ability to become involved in leisure activities.
3. Limited transport facilities.
4. Few social contacts with whom you can share your leisure time.
5. Residual disability which prevents you from returning to leisure activities that you were previously involved in.(1)

The information that follows will provide you with some strategies which may help you to re-establish your social contacts and select appropriate leisure activities. Some suggestions of the type of activities and services available within the community will also be given.

RE-ESTABLISHING SOCIAL CONTACTS

One of the most difficult phases of recovery following stroke may be at the point when you feel ready to start socialising again. Associated with this can be **feelings of fear** (eg fear that others will not treat you the same way as they did before) and **embarrassment** (due to alterations of your physical appearance, speech etc). To overcome this anxiety it may be best to start off by inviting people to your own home where you are likely to feel most comfortable. Once you feel confident interacting with friends in small groups you may wish to go on larger outings including going to the local shops, and attending support groups and other clubs. The final step will be to return to as many of your leisure activities as possible or to develop new leisure interests. (3)

WHAT TYPE OF LEISURE ACTIVITIES ARE SUITABLE FOR YOU?

In deciding what type of leisure activities are suitable it may be useful to consider the following questions:

1. **What do you like or not like to do?** (What are your interests?)
2. **What support systems are available?** (Do you have family members or friends who would be willing to attend activities with you? Do you know of any services within the community that could provide assistance?)
3. **What transport facilities are available?** (ie private car, public transport, taxis, community bus etc)
4. **When do you want to be involved in the activity?** (What days of the week and at what times?)
5. **How much money do you have available for leisure?** (ie in total per week)
6. **What type of difficulties do you feel you may be faced with?** (1)

WHAT IS AN APPROPRIATE LEISURE ROUTINE?

People tend to develop set leisure routines. Once interests have been established, they are placed into the weekly schedule when time is available.

A structured leisure routine is often important as it gives you the opportunity to:

- improve skills
- increase knowledge
- interact with others
- gain maximum enjoyment out of the activity.

However, in addition to regular activities you may also have interests that you like to pursue occasionally. These occasional activities usually give the opportunity to explore new options.(1)

Thus it is important to:

1. Have continued involvement and to further develop skills and interests in at least two different activities and to participate in the chosen activities regularly - at least once a week.
2. To participate in other leisure activities on an occasional basis.
3. Go on a holiday at least once a year. (1)

WHAT TYPE OF ACTIVITIES ARE AVAILABLE?

OUTDOOR ACTIVITIES

Outdoor activities and sport can be both invigorating and stimulating. Even a low level of exercise can have a positive impact on health, improving muscle tone, circulation, respiration, and coordination. For this reason there has been a great deal of emphasis on the therapeutic and rehabilitation value of outdoor activities, however with this aside **the main reason for involvement should be for fun, pleasure and companionship.**(2)

Activities such as walking, cycling and swimming are exercises which can help keep you fit and keep blood pressure down.(5) There are adapted devices available which can be of assistance for sporting and outdoor activities (contact the Independent Living Centre for more advice). Finally there are numerous services within the community that can give information and support to those people with residual disabilities who would like to become involved in sport and other outdoor activities. (Refer to the list at the end of this paper.)

INDOOR ACTIVITIES

Indoor activities can be pursued all year round and often have less physical demands than most outdoor activities. These activities offer many opportunities for social interaction within the wider community, while some can be carried out alone. (2)

Hobbies and arts and crafts have a great advantage as you can do them whenever you feel inclined and become as expert at them as you desire. For information on adapted devices for art and craft work (eg automatic needle threaders, needle clamps for one handed knitting and adapted sewing machines) contact the Independent Living Centre.(1,4) There are also various integration programmes available for people with disabilities. Many leisure courses are available through TAFE and WEA and there are 'integration' programmes and help for people with disabilities.

The Independent Living Centre will also be able to provide information that can help those with residual disabilities to continue playing their favourite games (eg card holders, large print cards, adapted board games etc).

(Refer to the list of services at the end of this paper.)

HOLIDAYS

There is no reason why people with residual disabilities following stroke should be excluded from travelling. People in the travel and tourist industries are becoming increasingly aware of people with special needs.

If you are planning a holiday a vital strategy is to plan ahead and get reliable information in advance about the general accessibility of the mode of transport that you wish to use and of the places that you would like to visit.(1) Refer to the list at the end of this paper for agencies and services which specialise in organising holidays for people with disabilities. It can sometimes be helpful for stroke persons and carers to have separate holidays "Absence makes the heart grow fonder".

FURTHER CONTACTS

Getting involved in leisure activities following stroke is often a gradual process. It is important to note that there are numerous services within the community that can be of assistance including:

- Your **local council** (refer to the white pages for the phone number) can provide information on leisure activities available within your local area and also give information about activities available for the disabled.
- **SASRAPID** (provides information on sports and recreation activities available for the disabled)
Phone 8410 6999
- **Broughton Arts Society** (teaches painting, pottery and cottage craft) Tues, Wed, Thurs
Phone 8272 7095
- **Independent Living Centre** - (information on adapted devices available for leisure activities) Phone 8266 5260

HOLIDAYS (Specialising in organising holidays for people with disabilities)

Wyatt Holidays – Phone: 8295 6923

East & North—Phone: 8365 7866

REFERENCES

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3. Hewer, R.L. & Wade, D.T. (1986). *Stroke: A practical guide towards recovery*. London: Martin Dunitz.
4. Reid, R (1992). *Caring for older people: A resource book for Australian carers*. Sydney: Allen & Unwin.
5. Youngson, R.M. (1987). *Stroke: A self help manual for stroke sufferers and their relatives*. USA: David & Charles.

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