

A guideline for practice: facilitate recovery of the flaccid arm of a person after stroke

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Introduction: The most common challenge for occupational therapists is to facilitate recovery of the affected arm of a person after a stroke. Common observations of a person with stroke are that person's affected arm is flaccid and non functional, thus the person tends not to involve this arm in any task. Common complaints regarding their affected arm are "lifeless and "useless". This paper will illustrate a guideline for practice to assist an occupational therapist to change the status of a person's flaccid arm from a non-functional to a gross assist or to use the arm as a stabilizer.

Objectives: The aim of this paper is to illustrate the link between theories and practical application. This guideline for practice includes a theoretical rationale, methods of evaluation, and intervention. The practical application will be illustrated by case reports.

Descriptions: The presentation of the theoretical rationale will be focused on the mechanism and importance of activating cutaneous receptors of affected arm prior to active weight bearing and use in functional tasks. The evaluation method will include a description of behaviors as observed in a person with a flaccid arm. In addition, treatment principles to promote behavior changes will be listed and described in the intervention section. A case example will be given.

Results/Discussion: This proposed guideline for practice will show the importance of providing sensory motor feedbacks for temporal patterns of muscle contractions. It creates a grip/friction between the surfaces suggesting that the adaptation of grip and load force is made through cutaneous inputs. It allows the person to use the affected arm as a gross assist in performing bimanual tasks. It also provides immediate functional response of the person's affected arm as there is reciprocal interaction between the stabilizing arm and postural adjustments of the trunk.

Conclusion: A person with a stroke is empowered to participate earlier in using their affected arm in occupations, as the affected arm does not appear to be helpless anymore.

Contribution to practice: This application provides therapists a structured guideline to work with a person with a flaccid arm in occupation.