



Stroke!

(Continued from page 7)

to cry. Don Osborne, the staff physical therapist at the Northern Westchester Hospital, was manipulating my impaired fingers one day about a week after my attack. We were joking. The next minute, inexplicably, I started weeping uncontrollably. Don just kept on working my hand, chatting away blithely. This kind of understanding can help a stroke victim immeasurably.

I spent more than two months under Dr. Rusk's supervision and still get hospital-administered physical therapy for two hours a day, three times a week. I've been most fortunate in such care. But most stroke victims get their treatment at home. With discipline, excellent results can be achieved, and without expensive equipment. No exercise should ever be attempted without specific instructions from your doctor, however. And he should check on your progress regularly. As a practical home guide, the U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare issues an excellent pamphlet, entitled "Strike Back at Stroke" (available at U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington 25, D.C., 40¢).

It's quite complete on everything from "What Is a Stroke?" and "How Families Can Help Patients," to illustrated ways of doing rehabilitation exercises.

Many common household articles are better than expensive mechanical contrivances for exercising. You can learn to walk again by using the backs of two chairs, sliding them over the kitchen linoleum in the same rhythm the arms normally take when you move about. "Much

better than crutches," says Dr. Rusk.

Using the slotted metal key to open a can of vacuum-packed coffee is a good exercise for strengthening the wrist and finger muscles. To develop control, try to turn doorknobs. Get someone to tie a piece of clothesline into a series of intricate knots, then you untie them.

I play cards with my family every night. At first I couldn't pick the cards up off the table with my weakened fingers, much less hold them. Now I can shuffle a deck, after a fashion. At present, I'm hard at work practicing penmanship with my bad hand, making old-fashioned ovals and up-and-downs, as I did in grade school. My children practice with me nightly. It's a game, but I notice that their writing has improved along with mine.

PLAIN WALKING, particularly up and down stairs, even though it is laborious, is just about the best thing you can do to exercise a stricken leg. If your house has no stairs, any carpenter can build you a portable set of three or four steps with a handrail for practice.

For the stroke patient, just getting back to doing things even halfway normally is a powerful incentive to get well.

My own recovery, I am told, will be almost total before the year is out. My blood pressure is under control, and I've trimmed my weight. Recently, I met an old acquaintance. He didn't know I'd been ill, and his first words were, "I haven't seen you looking so well in years." He refused to believe me when I told him what had happened.

To restore finger dexterity, Jim practices simple knot-tying (top left), shuffling deck of cards (lower left), hand gripping (top right), and opening a coffee can.

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