

How Circuit Training Can Help You Walk Better After Stroke

By Julia Schwarz

Circuit training workouts have become increasingly popular for those looking for an intense, quick workout. Circuit training involves rotating between several exercises that target different muscle groups with minimal rest in between. You may have heard of HIIT (High Intensity Interval Training) workouts or the “Bikini Body Guide”, a popular workout developed by an Australian trainer. These are two circuit workouts that many gym enthusiasts love, but you don’t have to be looking for a six-pack to take advantage of circuit classes.

How does this apply to my stroke recovery?

While you might not be ready to jump into a boot camp-style workout, studies have shown that circuit class therapy can help improve walking after stroke [\(1\)](#). These therapy classes are done in a group setting, but with plenty of staff to ensure you are safe and doing the exercises correctly. Classes have different stations at which you work on a specific task for a set period of time and then rotate. You come back to each station multiple times throughout the session, allowing you to practice the exercises over and over again. The fast paced, social environment helps you stay engaged and motivated.

Who runs these classes?

Don’t worry, you will not have to deal with a loud, whistle-happy coach leading your workouts. Physical therapists, who are trained in improving mobility and strength in patients who have had a stroke, run these classes.

When should I join one?

Circuit therapy classes can be effective for people at any time post-stroke: from days to years after your stroke as long as your doctor thinks you are ready. If you would like to work on improving your mobility and have spoken with your doctor about your readiness for this kind of

therapy, then you can give circuit therapy a try. Even if you are years post stroke and struggling with walking, it could be a great option for you.

What makes circuit class therapy special?

There are lots of therapy options out there, but this one is particularly suited for those looking to improve their walking after stroke. More people are able to walk on their own after completing circuit class therapy than after completing an equal amount of traditional physical therapy.

Circuit class therapy has even shown advantages over traditional therapy for helping people to walk faster and further (1). This may be due to the intensity of the programs, which involve repeatedly working on the same movements as you go around a circuit.

The results go beyond helping you improve results on a walking exam. The therapy also can help you to live a more active life. After the therapy was over, studies showed participants recorded more steps on a pedometer than those who had participated in traditional physical therapy programs (1). Living a more active lifestyle leads to huge health benefits. Active lifestyles reduce the risk of cardiovascular disease and of having another stroke. Many stroke survivors want to live more active lives, but feel trapped by their difficulties walking. If you feel this way, circuit therapy training might be the step you need to help you get back out and moving.

Where can I find a class?

If you're psyched to try circuit training classes, the best place to start is asking a physical therapist if they know of any in your area.

Sources

1. C. English, S. L. Hillier, E. A. Lynch, Circuit class therapy for improving mobility after stroke. Cochrane Database Syst Rev 6, CD007513 (2017).