



Don't underestimate the power of one arm: living independently after stroke

Ryan KE. *Beyond Stroke - Living Independently With One Arm*. 1st Edition. Ryan Publishing: Melbourne, Victoria, Australia; 2016. ISBN: 9781876498962.

Arm weakness after stroke is common and disabling.^{1–4} More than 20% of stroke survivors have moderate to severe arm paralysis 3 months after stroke.⁴ Furthermore, less than a third of these people will experience recovery of arm function.⁴

Stroke survivors believe arm function to be a critical but neglected issue after stroke.⁵ They perceive recovery to include regaining movement in the arm, but also becoming independent and getting on with life.⁵ They express feeling ill equipped with progressing their recovery of arm function.⁵ *Beyond Stroke - Living Independently with One Arm* written by Kate Ryan, a stroke survivor herself, is a simple, practical book that has been written to guide people after stroke in living a complete life with a paralysed arm.

This book is a timely reminder that therapists need to provide person-centred care after stroke. Specifically, this involves asking the stroke survivor how they would like to participate in domestic and family life, as well as in recreation. The book then encourages therapists to work collaboratively with the person to problem solve and practise tasks to achieve these goals.

Whilst in essence this book is written for stroke survivors, it can also help physiotherapists to understand the breadth of tasks a person may want to attempt with one arm (including cutting a watermelon). Importantly, the instructions provide a useful and realistic starting point for how to tackle each task.

The book contains introductory chapters designed to inspire stroke survivors towards living independent and confident lives. The author argues very positively for engaging in rehabilitation to improve affected arm function. However, the book also suggests ways that the person can use his/her unaffected arm to complete everyday tasks without assistance.

The book is then divided into seven chapters, each focusing on an aspect of daily living. These chapters include the following

topics: personal care, in the kitchen, opening food containers, around the house, children and babies, lifting large objects, and recreation.

The text is sparse and simple; it is designed to be easily read by people after stroke. There are numerous helpful pictures that systematically guide the reader through each task. Even the design of the book itself considers the likely reader, with pages that are easy to turn and stay open without arm support.

Of note is the chapter on caring for babies and children. This chapter covers important tasks that need to be completed by a parent such as swaddling a baby and fixing car seat buckles. The one-arm techniques come from the author's own experience as a mother. As a young clinician, this chapter would have been very helpful for me when treating mothers who had survived a stroke, particularly at or near birth.

Therapists should note that this book expresses the voice of a stroke survivor. It is important for us to listen and consider her perspective. When developing one-arm techniques to enable participation, this book is a helpful reference point, and it can be utilised along with suggestions from other stroke survivors or therapists.

This book would be a valuable resource in rehabilitation clinics and university libraries. Students and therapists alike can benefit from its positive focus on achieving tasks and a return to independent living. It challenges us to consider what is possible and not to limit stroke survivors based on their impairments.

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References

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A consumer's perspective

My introduction to life after a stroke came hand in hand with motherhood. I had a cerebral haemorrhage during labour with my beautiful Harry (now almost 8). I became conscious in ICU, 12 hours after his birth. It was a time of discovery of what I had gained and lost. I remember my mother-in-law prompting my husband to tell me that we had a baby boy, 9 weeks early and weighing only 1.1 kg. This of course was remarkable and we are so blessed to have such a light in our lives. I also remembered discovering that I couldn't 'find' my left arm. I had to pat the sheets until I felt the limb with my right arm, and needed to use my right hand to move my left arm. Quite a change from the concert I had given at the City Recital Hall, Sydney, several weeks earlier, where I had dexterously performed on the violin.

In *Beyond Stroke - Living Independently with One Arm*, Kate Ryan presents a very insightful and practical account of how to one

handedly perform many daily activities. She talks of the havoc a stroke can create in your life, and this book succeeds in providing a positive perspective, as the devastation can feel boundless. However, I consider myself very lucky: lucky to not be pushing up daisies and also lucky as my left arm and leg have recovered considerably over the years.

I had to work out for myself many of the 'life hacks' that are described in this book. It would have been very useful to have this manual at the time, especially some of the tricks for caring for babies. My only disappointment is there is no section on how to one handedly play the violin!

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