

What is mirror therapy?

Mirror therapy is a specific therapy designed to strengthen arms and hands weakened by a stroke. In mirror therapy, we use movements of the stronger hand and arm to “trick our brain” into thinking that the weaker arm is moving. Researchers have shown that this “tricking of the brain” actually works – the brain areas responsible for making the weaker arm move become stimulated. There is also some new work being done using mirror therapy on the leg (see photographs – under section – How often do I need to practice?)

How do I set up mirror therapy at home?

You start by placing a solid stand-alone mirror on a table lengthwise in front of you.



NOTE: You should sit in a sturdy chair while doing this activity. Place both your arms on the table one on either side of the mirror. The mirror side (where you can see the reflection of your arm) is placed so that you see your stronger arm. It is important that the mirror is large enough so that you can see your whole



arm and hand in it. You should not look at your weaker hand and arm – only focus on looking into the mirror. Now move your stronger hand while you watch the mirror. The image that you see in the mirror will make it seem like your weak hand is moving. This information on arm movement is sent to your brain that is then “tricked” into thinking that your weaker arm is moving.

Will it be of benefit to me?

Mirror therapy is especially useful for people who have very little movement of their arm and hand after a stroke. The research on how well this intervention works is still quite new. There is some encouraging evidence that suggests that by using mirror therapy, the part of your brain that is damaged is stimulated, encouraging recovery. In fact, research has shown that some patients experience greater improvements in movement when they participate in mirror therapy in addition to

their regular therapy, instead of just regular therapy alone. More research in the future will give us more information on just how beneficial mirror therapy is after a stroke.

Are there any risks to me?

There are no specific risks involved in participating in mirror therapy. It is important to use a non-breakable mirror just in case it falls over. It is also important to work in a seated position so that you can focus on your arm and hand without having to think about your balance and standing safety.

Mirror therapy is actually quite easy to do at home and many people find it a fun way of having additional therapy for their hand and arm.

Do I need any special equipment?

While specialized mirror boxes are available for purchase, using a sturdy table-sized mirror with a good solid stand works just as well.

How often do I need to practice?

There is no standardized protocol for mirror therapy. You should start with whatever amount of time you can tolerate and enjoy, and then gradually work up to a full series of movements and activities.



How do I begin?

Your rehabilitation therapist should be able to provide you with a program that will meet your individual needs. She or he can guide you as to:

- how many times a week you should do mirror therapy,
- what specific activities and movements you should do,
- what activities you should not do,
- how long each mirror therapy session should be,
- how to change activities as your hand and arm get stronger.

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