

Mental Practice

Patient information

What is mental practice?

Mental practice is also known as mental imagery or mental rehearsal. It is practicing a task without any actual movement. In other words, you imagine doing the task in your mind.

Athletes and musicians have used mental practice for a long time. It can improve their skill and performance.

Mental practice can be used after a neurological event, such as a stroke. It can help you move again. You can listen to audio of a task and imagine yourself doing it.

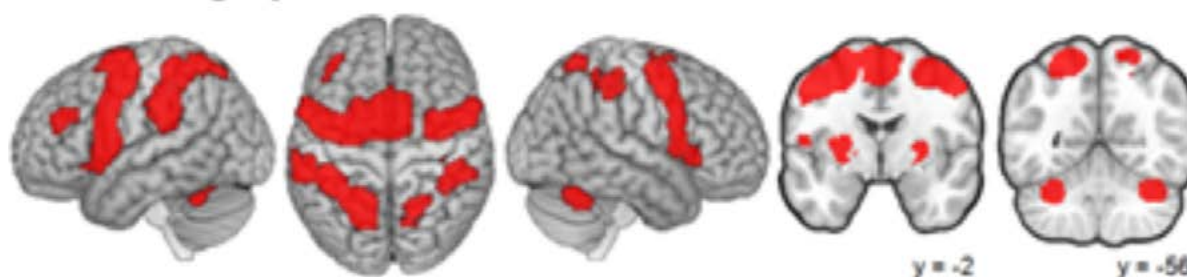
How does it work?

Mental practice is an addition to standard therapy. It can improve arm function and is recommended in the Royal College of Physicians Clinical Guidelines for Stroke (2023) and the NICE guidelines (2023).

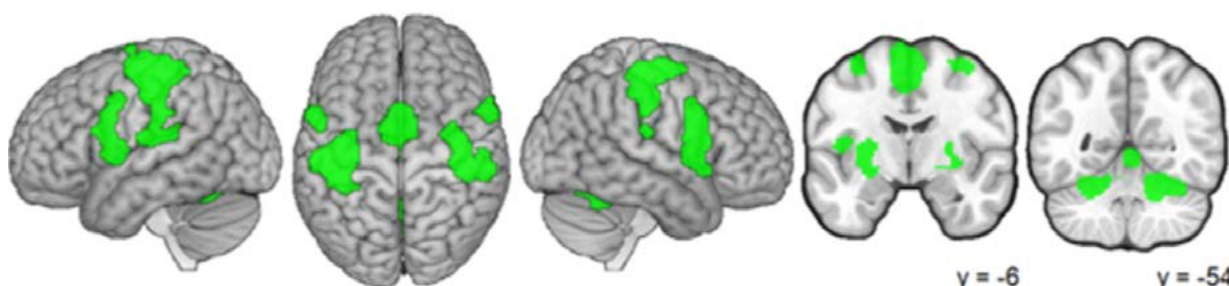
When you move your hand, you use certain areas of your brain. When you practice moving your hand in your mind, you use the same areas of your brain.

The sensitive brain scans below show this:

Areas of brain that are active during mental practice:



Areas of brain that are active during movement:



(Images taken from Hardwick et al 2018).

If you do not use your arm, the neural circuits in your brain will weaken. This will mean that over time you lose the ability to use it. This is called learned non-use. Practicing tasks in your mind can make your neural circuits stronger. This may stop you losing movement.

You can recover movement through neuroplasticity. This is the brains ability to re-wire and learn new tasks by doing repetitive activities.

How long is a session?

A session can last 5-20 minutes. Take short breaks as needed.

You should do sessions daily for four weeks.

It is important you keep practicing. You will not recover movement instantly.

Mental Practice can be a 'warm up' exercise before your therapy session.

How do I do it?

Find an area free from distraction. You could be in the room you are imagining.

Step 1:

With your good hand:

- Do your chosen task.
Watch how you do it.
Think about how it feels to move.
- Now close your eyes.
Think of that movement in your mind without actually moving your arm.

Step 2:

With your weaker hand:

- Keep your eyes closed.
Listen to the script.
Imagine your weaker hand doing that task in your mind.
Do not move.
- Repeat several times.
You can rest between tasks

Where can I find task scripts

You can record task scripts on your phone.

Your therapist can write scripts based on your interests and environment.

You can listen to the Saebo Mind podcast. <https://saebomind.saebo.com>



Listen to this podcast on



Apple Podcasts



Overcast



Pocket Casts



Goodpods



Castro



Castbox



Podfriend



RSS Feed

Watch this Saebo UK YouTube video.

www.youtube.com/watch?v=kYkxsRi3TbA

References

Hardwick R, Caspers, S, Eickhoff, S and Swinnen S (2018) Neural correlates of action: Comparing meta-analyses of imagery, observation, and execution. *Neuroscience and Biobehavioural Reviews* 94, p 31-44

National Clinical Guideline for Stroke for the UK and Ireland. London: Intercollegiate Stroke Working Party; 2023 May 4. Available at: www.strokeguideline.org

Stroke Rehabilitation in Adults. NICE guideline: October 2023. Recommendations | Stroke rehabilitation in adults | Guidance | NICE



This leaflet has been written in collaboration with:




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