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[Woman Recovers from Debilitating Stroke with Self-Determination and a Motivating Team of Experts](#)

# Woman Recovers from Debilitating Stroke with Self-Determination and a Motivating Team of Experts



November 07, 2024

Nayesha Figgs was enjoying dinner and a romantic date on an otherwise average Sunday on Dec. 11, 2022. Then her body hit the floor.

She awoke six weeks later in the ICU. She'd missed Christmas, New Year's Eve and most of January.

Though only 35, she'd suffered a major stroke and doctors had placed her in a

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medically induced coma. “Apparently my odds of surviving weren’t good,” recalls Nayesha.

Nor were her odds of reclaiming the life she once knew. When she awoke, she was barely able to talk and couldn’t swallow, see out of her right eye, move her limbs or breathe unassisted.

## Stroke Risks

Nayesha had long faced stroke risks. As a child, she was diagnosed with type 1 diabetes and later developed high blood pressure.

“I was always going to the emergency room for one thing or another,” she says.

## Mission of Recovery

Now she faced her biggest challenges, on a journey that started with **JFK Johnson Rehabilitation Institute’s** inpatient brain trauma and extended recovery units in her hometown of Edison, New Jersey.

She had to relearn how to swallow, eat, sit, walk, write and talk clearly. And by observing her extended recovery roommate—bedbound for years—she realized self-sufficiency could be challenging.

“But that motivated me to try even harder,” Nayesha says. “If someone told me I couldn’t do something, my attitude was, ‘Yeah, for now.’ The stroke is part of me, but I didn’t want it to define me.”

At her side was an inpatient team of doctors, nurses and physical, occupational and speech therapists



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trained in rehabilitation, who worked together with her to help her restore basic abilities. They were dedicated to her goal of regaining her independence—even when it was difficult.

Yet she never felt sorry for herself. Instead, she gave herself pep talks, set small goals and fiercely persevered to achieve them.

“If I didn’t accomplish a goal as quickly as I wanted, I’d remind myself, ‘That’s OK, you’re not dying. You just need a little more time.’ ”

The first time Nayesha sat up on the side of her bed was January 2023. Though she needed one nurse behind her to hold up her head and back, and one in front to ensure she didn’t topple, that was a major victory.

She stuck to it. Later that month she walked for the first time, clinging to a railing as a physical therapist crouched to help her lift each leg.

Step by step, move by move, JFK Johnson Rehabilitation Institute’s stroke rehabilitation specialists helped her regain most of her function and strength.

“They believed in me as much as I did,” she says of the inpatient therapy team she still visits.

She was so determined to get home that she had nurses teach her how to clean and attach her feeding tube on her own, enabling her to be released ahead of schedule from inpatient rehab on April 20, 2023.

## Victory Lap

On that day, Nayesha's sister Shanice Figgs threw her a welcome-home party and shared a video of Nayesha's progress.

"I get emotional when I see how far I've come," Nayesha says.

A week later, Nayesha had surgery to restore her right eye's vision, then began JFK Johnson's outpatient physical therapy to progress beyond a wheelchair.

"Nayesha does strength and balance exercises till she perfects them," says Ashley LaTona, PT, DPT, physical therapy supervisor of outpatient physical therapy at JFK Johnson. "She's been one of my most motivated patients. Her determination has allowed us to progress so much more quickly."

Nayesha's most treasured triumph came on June 12, 2023, when she ditched a feeding tube and began eating solid food. To do so, she'd have to pass a barium swallow test—that she'd flunked four previous times.

"I was so happy, I cried," she says. "I'd worked so hard for that moment."

That month, she also went from a wheelchair to a walker. In July she began using a cane, and by September, she walked without the cane.

But there's still work to be done. Today, Nayesha's fine tuning her balance, stair-climbing and walking on uneven surfaces, all with help from JFK Johnson's outpatient team.

"We're here as long as the patient needs us," says [Leslie Bagay, M.D.](#), a physical

medicine and rehabilitation doctor (physiatrist) with JFK Johnson's outpatient program. "We've also ensured she's getting appropriate medical follow-ups and education to help her avoid future strokes."

Although Nayesha is still recovering, "she's already a success story," LaTona says.

As usual, Nayesha views any lingering limitations as challenges to overcome.

"There's no room to be negative because I'm so lucky to be alive," she says. "I just need time. When you're positive, positive things happen."

## Next Steps & Resources

- Meet our source: [Leslie Bagay, M.D.](#),
- To make an appointment with a physical medicine and rehabilitation specialist near you, call [800-822-8905](#) or visit our [website](#).
- Learn more about [rehabilitation](#) at Hackensack Meridian *Health*.

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