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# Stroke study world first

## Alana Rosenbaum

AUSTIN Health will conduct a world-first study on the rehabilitation of stroke victims.

Bucking the trend to delay stroke rehabilitation for up to two weeks, the hospital will start treatment within 24 hours of the stroke in a bid to minimise long-term brain damage.

Austin Hospital physiotherapist Dr Julie Bernhardt said anecdotal evidence gathered in Norway suggests that early intervention reduces mortality rates and leads to a swifter recovery.

"The study is focused on early movement. Within 24 hours, we have



**Within 24 hours, we have the patient sitting up, standing and involved in exercise**

DR JULIE BERNHARDT

the patient sitting up, standing and involved in exercise," she said.

Dr Bernhardt received \$115,000 from the Heart Foundation towards the study that will involve the treatment of 2000 Austin patients

over five years. Only patients who present to the hospital within 24 hours of suffering a stroke will be eligible to take part in the study.

Dr Bernhardt said that while rehabilitation begins immediately after a cardiac arrest, stroke victims are encouraged to rest in bed for up to two weeks and remain motionless.

She said it has long been falsely held that exercise could trigger a second stroke and that patients should be kept still while recovering from stroke-related brain injuries.

The anecdotal evidence on early stroke rehabilitation was gathered at St Olav's Hospital in Trondheim, Norway, which Dr Bernhardt visited recently to research the Melbourne

study. She said that as well as improving the survival rates and minimising disability, early intervention improved patients' psychological state.

Dr Bernhardt said that under the study, people who had suffered mild strokes would be encouraged to get out of bed and walk around the hospital at 20-minute intervals.

Patients left with impaired consciousness and language skills due to a severe stroke would be encouraged to sit up in bed as early as possible, Dr Bernhardt said.

More than 45,000 Australians a year suffer from stroke, a condition that results from blood clots that blocks the flow of blood to the brain.