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**UNIVERSITÉ GRENOBLE ALPES** 

UFR DE MÉDECINE DE GRENOBLE

Année : 2021

## WEIGHT-BEARING ASYMMETRY: RECOVERY OR NOT?

## THÈSE PRÉSENTÉE POUR L'OBTENTION DU TITRE DE DOCTEUR EN MÉDECINE

## DIPLÔME D'ÉTAT

Ophélie FOLMER

[Données caractère personnel]

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## RESUME

**Objectifs**. L'évolution de l'asymétrie d'appui après accident vasculaire cérébral (AVC) est peu décrite dans la littérature. Nos objectifs sont d'analyser l'évolution de la répartition des appuis à la phase subaiguë d'un AVC et d'explorer la relation entre la récupération des capacités d'équilibre, évaluées par l'échelle PASS (Postural Assessment Scale for Stroke) et l'amélioration de l'asymétrie d'appui.

**Méthode**. Cohorte de 31 patients admis en rééducation après un premier AVC hémisphérique. La répartition des appuis et l'instabilité ont été mesurées à deux reprises grâce à deux plateformes de force. L'asymétrie d'appui était diagnostiquée quand le côté parétique était chargé à moins de 41% ou plus de 59% du poids du corps. Les déficits cliniques et les scores fonctionnels de mobilité ont également été évalués. Une forte récupération de l'asymétrie d'appui a été définie comme une amélioration supérieure au changement minimal détectable (MDC) qui est de 5%. Nous avons comparé les caractéristiques entre les patients qui récupèrent fortement leur asymétrie d'appui, et ceux qui ne récupèrent pas ou peu.

**Résultats**. La première évaluation a été réalisée après une période post-AVC médiane de 41 (32;70) jours et la deuxième après 82 (59;95) jours. La répartition des appuis était significativement plus symétrique à la deuxième session (6.8 à 4.1% du poids du corps ; p=0.040). Selon notre critère de symétrie, 10/31 patients ont été considérés comme asymétriques (9 patients déchargent et 1 surcharge le côté parétique). Parmi eux, l'amélioration de l'asymétrie d'appui était significative (p=0.004) et hautement corrélée à la récupération des capacités d'équilibre (R=-0.81 ; p=0.005). Quel que soit le type d'asymétrie d'appui, 4/10 (40%) patients ont présenté une forte récupération de leur asymétrie (amélioration médiane de 11.3% du poids du corps). Ils présentaient des déficits initiaux plus sévères, notamment concernant la force motrice du membre inférieur parétique (p=0.019).

**Conclusion**. La répartition des appuis devient plus symétrique avec le temps parmi des patients hospitalisés en rééducation à la phase subaigüe d'un AVC. Une forte récupération de l'asymétrie d'appui est particulièrement retrouvée chez les patients qui présentent des déficits initiaux sévères, qui ont donc une plus grande marge de progression. Cette récupération de l'asymétrie d'appui est fortement associée à une amélioration des capacités d'équilibre, évaluées par l'échelle PASS. Cela suggère que la récupération d'une symétrie d'appui est nécessaire pour améliorer l'équilibre. Ces résultats renforcent l'importance d'une rééducation spécifique de l'asymétrie d'appui après AVC.

Mots clés : AVC, posturographie, équilibre, contrôle postural, asymétrie d'appui, récupération

## ABSTRACT

**Objectives**. Little is known about the evolution of the weight-bearing asymmetry (WBA) after stroke. Our objectives were to describe and analyze the evolution of the weight bearing distribution in the subacute phase after stroke, and to explore the relationship between the recovery of balance ability in daily life, assessed by the Postural Assessment Scale for Stroke (PASS), and the recovery of WBA.

Methods. Cohort study of 31 individuals admitted to rehabilitation after a first

hemispheric stroke. Weight-bearing distribution and instability were measured twice with a dual force platform, with vision. Clinical deficits and functional abilities were also assessed. WBA was diagnosed when the paretic leg was under-loaded less than 41% of body weight or over-loaded more than 59% of body weight. Strong WBA recovery was defined as an improvement greater than the Minimal Detectable Change (5%). We compared the characteristics between the individuals who showed a strong recovery of WBA and those who didn't.

**Results**. The first assessment was performed at a median time of 41 (32;70) days post-stroke and the second assessment 82 (59;95) days post-stroke. Weight-bearing distribution was more symmetric at the second assessment (from 6.8 to 4.1% of body weight; p=0.040). According to our threshold criteria, 10/31 (32%) patients were considered asymmetric (9 under-loading and 1 over-loading the paretic leg). Among them, the recovery of WBA was significant (p=0.004) and was highly correlated to balance recovery (R=-0.81; p=0.005). Whatever the WBA type, 4/10 (40%) showed a strong WBA recovery (median improvement of 11.3% of body weight). They presented more severe deficits at first assessment, especially regarding the lower limb motor command (p=0.019).

**Conclusion**. Weight-bearing distribution becomes more symmetric among patients in the subacute phase post stroke during their inpatient rehabilitation. A strong WBA recovery was found especially among individuals who had a more severe initial profile, so a wider potential for

improvement. The recovery of balance and WBA are closely associated. This suggests that a recovery of weight-bearing asymmetry is needed to improve balance in daily life. This finding strengthens the relevance of a specific WBA rehabilitation.

<u>Key words</u>: stroke, posturography, postural control, balance, weight-bearing asymmetry, recovery

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Postural disorders represent the leading cause of disability after stroke (1), leading to a loss of autonomy (2) and exposing patients to a high risk of falling (3).

Balance and postural ability can be globally assessed using balance scales dedicated to stroke such as the Postural Assessment Scale for Stroke Patients (PASS) (4), or generic scales such as the Berg Balance Scale (BBS) (5). The main interest of these balance scales is that they are applicable for all patients, regardless the severity of their disorders. However, while these scales only examine the consequences of the impaired postural and balance control, instrumental evaluations such as posturography, can provide information about the underlying mechanisms involved in balance disorders, in order to guide their rehabilitation.

The quiet standing posture of individuals after stroke is characterized by an increase in postural sway and a postural asymmetry expressed by an asymmetrical weight distribution (weight-bearing asymmetry WBA) or by a shift of the center of pressure (CoP) in the mediolateral plane (ML) towards the non-paretic side of the body (6,7). These latter measures, WBA and CoP ML are highly related (8). WBA is very common after stroke: about a third of patients stand asymmetrically in the subacute stroke stage, and this behaviour remains present in the chronic stage (9). The degree of WBA during quiet standing is strongly related to gait variables, such as gait velocity (10), and is associated with the level of gait independence (11).

Studies found that WBA is related to motor weakness (2), asymmetrical muscular tone (12) and somatosensory deficits (13), but also to spatial cognition disorders such as spatial neglect (12) and lateropulsion (14). Indeed, the right hemisphere, known to be the hemisphere of spatial cognition (15), seemed to be involved in WBA (16). Misperception of spatial references and body representations could result in distortion of the coordinates used to distribute loading on the two legs while standing. A strong association has been demonstrated between WBA and a bias in the

representation of the Longitudinal Body Axis (LBA), suggesting that WBA partly reflects an altered representation of egocentric reference in the frontal axis (14).

Therefore, WBA after a stroke is a complex postural behavior, and could be considered to be both a direct consequence of the unilateral hemispheric lesion through the sensitive-motor deficit and the spatial neglect, and also a strategy to compensate for a contralesional lateropulsion induced by a wrong internal model of verticality (17,18). This complexity might explain why studies which have investigated the recovery of the post-stroke WBA present conflicting results. Indeed, some found a decrease of weight-bearing asymmetry over time (7,19,20), while others did not, despite a considerable recovery in terms of independence in walking and activities of daily living (21). In addition, even in studies who found a significant reduction, a WBA of about 10% persisted and it increased with a dual-task interference, indicating that weight bearing never became fully automated (19). Among these longitudinal studies, none of them were able to establish possible determinants of the WBA recovery. This is however a major issue in neurorehabilitation.

Our first goal was to analyze the evolution of weight bearing distribution among a series of patients in the subacute phase after stroke while they received conventional rehabilitation. Then we wanted to compare the individuals who showed a strong recovery of WBA and those who didn't. Finally, we attempted to explore the relationship between the recovery of WBA and balance, assessed by the PASS score. Our hypothesis was that weight-body distribution becomes more symmetric over time. We expected that the individuals who showed a strong WBA recovery may also show an improvement of lower limb muscle strength and spatial cognition. Also, we thought that balance after a stroke can be improved while weight bearing asymmetry didn't recovered, which would be regarded as a compensatory mechanism.

## **METHODS**

## Study design

This is a monocentric observational study, using the data of DOBRAS (Determinants of Balance Recovery After Stroke) cohort, in which participants with a first hemispheric stroke, were assessed in routine care, after being admitted in neurorehabilitation department of Grenoble-Alpes University hospital. Assessments of sensory, motor and cognitive deficits were performed at fixed time by trained and multidisciplinary examiners, with blinding to other data and the study hypotheses. Patients were included between 2012 and 2019. Among patients included in DOBRAS Cohort, some had a posturographic registration in the frame of the ancillary study DOBRAS Initial Posturography (DOBRAS-IP).

## **Ethical considerations**

The DOBRAS cohort was approved by our institutional review board (CHU Grenoble Alpes) who validated the ClinicalTrials.gov registration (NCT03203109). The study was also registered at the National Committee for Informatics and Freedom (Commission Nationale Informatique et Liberté; CNIL-No.2014874-v1) and was performed in accordance with the Helsinki Declaration. According to French law, observational studies do not require approval by an ethics committee, provided that participants have been informed of the specific research and are not opposed to use of their data. All eligible individuals were informed of the DOBRAS study (orally and in writing) and those who did not want to participate signed an opposition form.

## **Participants**

Eligibility criteria of the DOBRAS study were: age  $\geq 18$  to 80 years and a first-ever unilateral stroke limited to one hemisphere. Exclusion criteria were: recurrent stroke, complication at the acute stage (malignant infarct, cerebral herniation, severe subarachnoid hemorrhage and

hydrocephalus), dementia, previous disability interfering with balance or vestibular disorders, unstable medical condition or psychiatric problems and not French speaking.

In the present study, we analyzed the evolution of posturographic parameters of the individuals from the DOBRAS cohort who had two posturographic assessments at the subacute phase, recorded at least 14 days apart. To perform a posturographic assessment, they had to be able to stand independently for at least 30 seconds. Individuals with an obvious osteoarticular disorders of the lower limbs or of the trunk were excluded.

Participants of the DOBRAS study were recruited in our rehabilitation department, and so followed a personalized rehabilitation program, taking into account deficits and activity limitations. According to their abilities, they had 2 physiotherapy and 1 occupational therapy sessions per day (total 1h30), plus, if needed, sessions with speech therapist, neuropsychologist, psychologist, or orthoptist. Rehabilitation sessions included weight shifting exercises, balance and gait training.

## Assessments timing

First posturographic session (S1) was assessed, if possible, at the day-30 (D30) after stroke. If patients were not able to stand independently on D30 or if they were admitted after D30, they were assessed later, but always within the first three months after stroke onset. Participants were then randomly reassessed at non-fixed times. For the second posturographic session (S2), we chose to analyze the data of the session that most closely matches a delay of 30 days after the first assessment.

Assessments of clinical deficits and mobility limitations were performed at fixed time (30 days, 60 days, 90 days, 120 days). We analyzed the data which best corresponds to the period of the two posturographic sessions.

## **Posturographic assessments**

### Procedure

Posturography was performed in bipodal stance, using the commercial two-force platform Feetest6 (Techno Concept©), fixed to the ground in a quiet room dedicated to this activity, and recorded by a trained examiner blinded of the study hypothesis.

## Instructions and conditions

Patients stood barefoot, one foot on each of the two platforms, with feet parallel and heels separated by 14cm. This standardization of feet position allowed to accurately and reliably measure the weight body distribution, since WBA is sensitive to feet conditions (22).

For security reasons, participants stood within a handrail shaped behind and besides the plateforms, with a chair behind them. They were helped to stand-up from this chair and sit down for a rest, at any time, if needed. The examiner checked feet position on the plate-forms before each trial, then stood at the paretic side to prevent fall during trials. Trials requiring help (handrail grip, human assistance) were considered aborted and then repeated.

Participants were instructed to remain as still as possible, with arms hanging alongside the trunk, looking at straight ahead at a visual target (a small color ball of 3 cm diameter) positioned at gaze level on a white wall distant from 2-3 m.

Three trials of 30 sec were recorded. Participants had a few minutes rest between each trial. If the participant was able to stand with eyes closed, three trials were then assessed without vision. We decided not to analyze these data since vision does not seem to affect WBA values according to previous studies (19,21).

## Data analysis

The mean vertical forces were recorded by the plates under both legs over the duration of the trial and were expressed as a percentage of body weight. On the basis of a systematic review with meta-analysis (23) having calculated the cut-off values for symmetrical WB (41-59%), participants were considered as asymmetric if they bore < 41% or > 59% of body weight on their paretic side.

*Absolute weight-bearing asymmetry* was expressed as the difference from the midpoint (50%): 0 represents a perfect weight distribution (50:50)

Absolute 
$$WBA = |50 - \% \text{ of } WB \text{ under the paretic leg}|$$

*Instability* is represented by two standard deviations of the CP coordinates along each axis, mediolateral and antero-posterior, which correspond to the quantity of sway and the dispersion of the CP coordinates.

For each posturographic parameters, values of the 3 trials were averaged for the statistical analyses.

### Clinical deficits and mobility limitations

<u>Deficits</u> were evaluated by a battery of well validated tests and scales, assessing motor weakness, spasticity, sensory loss, visual field defect, cognitive and language disorders. To avoid any statistical inflation, we limited the analyses to the four following clinical parameters, known to be determinants of WBA:

*Lower limb motor command* was assessed by physiotherapists with the Medical Research Council scale (24) which involves testing muscles against gravity and the examiner's resistance. Scores range from 0 (no contraction) to 5 (full range of motion against gravity with maximal resistance). Eight key muscle groups (hip flexors and extensors, hip abductors and adductors, knee flexors and extensors, ankle flexors and extensors) of the paretic lower limb were tested with a total score from 0 to 40 (normal strength).

*Lower limb spasticity* was assessed by physiotherapists with the modified Ashworth Scale (25). Scores range from 0 (no increase in tone) to 4 (limb rigid) depending on the increase in muscle tone during a passive movement. Five key muscle groups (hip flexors and adductors, quadriceps, hamstrings and triceps sural) of the lower paretic limb were tested with a total score from 0 to 20 (severe spasticity).

*Spatial neglect* was assessed by neuropsychologists with 6 paper and pencil tests and by the ecological Catherine Bergego Scale (26).

Three tests evaluated the non-body neglect. The Bells test (27) is a cancelation task with bells and distractors: result was considered altered with > 6 omissions. The line bisection (28), in which patient is asked to bisect 2 lines (5cm and 20cm): result was considered pathologic with mean ipsilesional deviations > 7 mm. The Gainotti copy (29) is a copying test: result was considered altered with  $\geq$  1 omission.

Three tests evaluated the body neglect. The thumb-finding test (30) is a simple task that assess the ability to reach the contralesional hand with the ipsilesional arm with eyes closed: result was considered altered with score  $\geq 1$ . The Fluff test (31), in which the blindfolded patient has to remove 24 targets attached to his clothes in a time limit of 2 mn: result was considered pathologic with < 13 targets detached. The comb and razor test (32), in which patient is asked to comb the hair, to shave (for men) or to make up (for women): result was considered altered with a score > 11%.

The Catherine Bergego Scale result was considered altered with a score  $\geq 2$ .

A few individuals with severe comprehension (aphasia) or executive troubles were not able to complete the whole neglect battery but had to perform at least three tests to not be considered with missing data. Spatial neglect was considered absent if all test results were normal or light if only one test result was marginally altered, moderate or severe with results of least two tests markedly altered.

*Lateropulsion,* which is defined by a contralesional tilt in a sitting or standing position, was assessed by physiotherapists using the Scale for Contraversive Pushing (SCP) (33) with total score ranging from 0 to 6 (severe lateropulsion).

Mobility limitation was assessed with a balance and a walking scale dedicated to stroke.

*Balance ability* was evaluated by the Postural Assessment Scale for Stroke (PASS) (34), which was assessed by physiotherapists. It is used to assess static and dynamic balance of stroke patients evaluating ability to maintain or change a given lying, sitting, or standing posture.

This scale includes 12 items scored from 0 to 3, for a total score from 0 to 36 (good balance skills). *Gait independence* was evaluated with the modified Fugl-Meyer Assessment (mGait-FM) (35). This walking scale evaluate patient performances depending on the degree of assistance with scores ranging from 0 (no walking) to 6 (normal walking).

## Statistical analysis

Distributions of the posturographic and clinical parameters were determined using the Shapiro-Wilk test. Continuous data were presented as mean (standard deviation) if they are normally distributed or as median (Q1;Q3) if they are not. Dichotomized data are presented as number (%). To determine the evolution of clinical and posturographic parameters between the two assessments, we used paired sample t-tests: paired Student t-test if the differences are normally distributed or paired Wilcoxon test if not. Changes ( $\Delta$ ) were represented by the difference between the values of the two sessions.

$$\Delta = score at S2 - score at S1$$

Then we analyzed more precisely the evolution of balance. As the Minimal Detectable Change for the PASS score is 2.2 (36), we defined "strong recovery" as an improvement  $\geq$  3 of PASS score. We considered that the participants who can't have an improvement  $\geq$  3 of PASS score because of a ceiling effect (i.e. with a PASS score  $\geq$  34) had already very satisfactory balance abilities. We decided to separate the individuals in three groups: a group who had already a satisfactory PASS score at S1; among the others, we distinguished a group who recovered strongly and a group who didn't. Similarly, we analyzed the evolution of weight-bearing distribution. As aforementioned, we considered participants with a percentage of body weight loaded on their paretic side between 41 and 59% as symmetric. For weight-bearing asymmetry, the Minimal Detectable Change reach 5% of body weight (37). It means that a difference greater to 5% is not due to random variability (with a 95% confidence level). We defined "strong recovery" as an improvement > 5% of body weight between the two assessments. We separated the individuals in three groups: a first group who had already a symmetrical body weight distribution at S1, a second group who presented a weight-bearing asymmetry at S1 and who showed small or no recovery.

Then we compared the group of individuals who showed a strong WBA recovery with the group of individuals who didn't. To compare proportions of dichotomized variables between the groups, Fisher's exact test was used because the sample wasn't large enough. Means of continuous data were compared between the groups using the Student's t-test for the normal distributions or Wilcoxon test for non-normal distributions.

Finally, we analyze the correlation between the evolution of WBA and the evolution of balance abilities, assessed by the PASS score. We correlated the changes ( $\Delta$ ) of WBA and PASS score with Spearman's rank correlation test due to the non-normal distribution.

Two-sided p < 0.05 was considered statistically significant. All statistical analyses were performed using R software (Version 1.2.5001).

## **RESULTS**

## **Participants**

Figure 1 shows the flow diagram of the study. Thirty-one individuals followed in the DOBRAS\_IP study had two or more valid posturographic assessments performed at least 14 days apart. Among those 31 patients who have been assessed at least twice, the median time between stroke onset and the first assessment were 41 (32;70) days and 82 (59;95) days for the second assessment. The median time period between the two sessions were 28 (26;39) days.

There were 21/31(68%) males, with a median age of 68 (63;73) years old. Stroke was ischemic in 26/31 (84%) and affected the right hemisphere in 17/31 (55%). The median total length of hospital stay since stroke was 91 (73;108) days. The mean FIM score at S1 was 94 (18). A moderate or severe spatial neglect has been identified in 20/31 (65%) participants.

The clinical deficits, mobility limitations and posturographic outcomes assessed at the first session are presented in Table 1 and Table 2 respectively. Only one data was missing and concerned lower limb weakness (n=1).

Overall, 21/31 (68%) individuals had a symmetric distribution of their body weight at S1, 9/31 (29%) loaded less than 41% of body weight on their paretic side and 1/31 (3%) loaded more than 59% on their paretic side.

## Evolution of clinical deficits and mobility limitation

Clinical outcomes and mobility limitation scores at S2 and the differences between the sessions  $(\Delta)$  are presented in Table 1. Participants had a greater lower limb motricity at the second session, with a statistically significant difference (median  $\Delta = 1$ , p <10<sup>-3</sup>). The spasticity of the lower limb was stable (median  $\Delta = 0$ , p=0.205). We decided not to analyze the evolution of neglect due to a lack of data. All mobility scores (PASS, mGait-FM) significantly improved.

Figure 2 shows the individual evolutions of PASS score. None of the participants deteriorated.

13/31 (42%) individuals had already a satisfactory PASS score (as described in the methods) at S1. Among the others, 5/18 (28%) showed a strong recovery (as described in the methods) and 13/18 (72%) didn't.

## Evolution of weight bearing distribution

Table 2 shows that the 31 participants were globally more symmetric at the second assessment, with a median difference between the two sessions of 1.4% (p=0.040). When selecting only the 10 participants who presented an asymmetric weight distribution at S1, irrespective to the side of the asymmetry, the median difference between the two sessions was 3.2% (from 11.3 to 8.7%, p=0.004).

Figure 2a. represents the individual evolutions of weight-body distribution on the paretic side. Among the 21 patients who were symmetric at S1, 19 stayed symmetric at S2 and two became marginally asymmetric, probably due to random variability ( $\Delta \le 5\%$ ). Among the 9 patients who loaded less than 41% of body weight on their paretic side at S1, 4 recovered strongly (as described in the methods) and 5 didn't. The patient who loaded more than 59% of body weight on his paretic side at S1 showed only a small recovery. None of the 31 participants presented a strong deterioration.

From Figure 2b., representing the individual evolutions of absolute weight-bearing asymmetry, we constituted three groups identified by different colors. A first group with 21 individuals who all were symmetric at S1 and stayed symmetric at S2 (except two). A second group with 4 individuals who were asymmetric at S1, irrespective of the side, and who strongly recovered. And finally, a third group of 6 individuals asymmetric at S1 who showed small or no recovery.

## Factors influencing the recovery of weight bearing asymmetry

Tables 3 and 4 compare the group of individuals who were asymmetric at S1 and who strongly recovered to the group with no or small recovery. First, participants who showed a strong WBA recovery were more asymmetric at S1, despite the difference was not statistically significant. They also tended to be more unstable at S1 along both axis, but without significance. Instability decrease was not significantly different between the groups.

Concerning clinical deficits, among the group with strong recovery, participants had a more important initial lower limb weakness, with a significant difference between groups, and tended to have a better motor improvement between the two sessions, but the difference didn't reach significance. Participants tended also to be more spastic and to show more severe lateropulsion but none of the differences was significant. Spatial neglect was equally distributed between groups. Concerning mobility, initial balance was significantly weaker among individuals who showed a strong WBA recovery, and improved more strongly at S2 than the group with no or small WBA recovery. No significant difference was found concerning gait. Moreover, the group with strong recovery benefited from a longer time between the two assessments, despite the difference was not significant.

Finally, no difference was noted according to demographic characteristics, stroke side or stroke mechanism.

## The relationship between recovery of weight-bearing asymmetry and balance

Figure 4 shows the correlation between WBA recovery and PASS recovery, each represented by the changes between the two sessions ( $\Delta$ ).  $\Delta$  WBA and  $\Delta$  PASS were strongly and significantly correlated (R=-0.81; p=0.005): the more weight-bearing asymmetry improved, the more balance in daily life recovered.

## DISCUSSION

Our study confirms that the weight-bearing distribution becomes more symmetric among a series of patients in the subacute phase post stroke during their inpatient rehabilitation. This is the first study exploring the evolution of weight-bearing distribution at an individual level, using the MDC to detect changes. Among the individuals who presented an asymmetry according to our threshold, 40% showed a strong recovery. These patients who recovered strongly were more heavily impaired at first assessment, indicating that even a severe asymmetry with severe deficits and mobility limitations can be reduced after rehabilitation. Contrary to our hypothesis, the reduction of WBA is strongly associated to the improvement of balance abilities.

## Monitoring and evaluation tools for postural and balance disorders after stroke

Balance is one of the major issues in stroke rehabilitation since it represents one of the predictors of rehabilitation outcomes (38,39) and length of stay in rehabilitation center (40). That is why assessing postural and balance after stroke is a major preoccupation of clinicians and researchers, leading to multiple scales developed in the literature. The Postural Assessment Scale for Stroke is a gold standard tool in the evaluation of post-stroke balance disorders. It is applicable for all patients, both in best and poor postural abilities and requires no special equipment. It has demonstrated good psychometric properties. Indeed, studies found a very high reliability (37,41,42) and a high responsiveness (43–45) of the PASS, which are of fundamental importance in a longitudinal study.

Similarly, the assessment of weight-bearing distribution on a two-force platform revealed excellent within and between sessions reliability among individuals with stroke (37,46). One previous study observed poor reliability but they evaluated the mean center of pressure (COP) position along the ML axis with a unique posturographic force-platform (47). This reliability is enhanced by the standardization of assessment conditions, including feet position (22), trial duration (48), visual condition (49), oral instructions (50) and number of trials (51,52).

#### The recovery of WBA

The present study found that weight-bearing distribution was more symmetric over time. Among the participants who presented an asymmetry according to our threshold, 40% recovered strongly. Most of the previous studies which explored the evolution of posturographic parameters in poststroke patients included participants at a late stage with a wide period of time between assessments. Sackey et al assessed 69 post-stroke patients on average 11.5±5.0 weeks after stroke and 18 weeks later. De Haart et al followed 37 patients from an average time of 10.0±5.4 weeks post stroke, and then 2, 4, 8 and 12 weeks later. These two latter studies found a similar and significant improvement even if a degree of WBA persisted. In the first study, WBA decreased from 12 to 10% among left stroke and from 12 to 8% among right stroke; in the second study from 12.6% to 9.2%. Laufer et al evaluated 30 elderly patients at an earlier stage (one and two months after stroke onset) and found no recovery of WBA whereas function and mobility improved. However, these longitudinal studies only compared group means, and don't analyze WBA recovery at an individual level.

#### Factors influencing the recovery of WBA

In this study we tried to define a profile of patients according to their recovery of WBA: our results show that the individuals who improved their WBA seem to have more severe initial deficits, especially regarding the lower limb motor command. This appears to be logical since motor weakness is a known determinant of WBA (2) and a wider deficit let them have a larger margin of progress.

In the aforementioned longitudinal studies, none of them were able to establish a link between WBA recovery and clinical or demographic characteristics. De Haart et al (19) tested the influence of clinical characteristics over time on WBA within a MANOVA design. They showed that the stroke patients presenting an ankle clonus showed on average 98% more weight-bearing

asymmetry, but no interaction effect over time were found for all clinical characteristics. Laufer et al (21) tested the influence of stroke side on WBA recovery and found no main effect. The remaining studies (7,53) didn't analyze the impact of clinical deficits on WBA recovery and none of them describe a profile of patients according to their WBA recovery.

### The relationship between recovery of WBA and balance

In the present study, the recovery of WBA and the evolution of balance abilities were highly correlated.

Only one (19) of the studies previously mentioned used a balance scale, which evaluated the sitting balance (Trunk Control Test). They analyzed the recovery of the sitting balance separately from WBA recovery and found an improvement during the follow-up.

The correlation between the amplitude of WBA and poor balance scores was already clear (54–56), but, to our knowledge, the relationship between the recovery of these two variables has never been explored.

This strong association suggests that a recovery of WBA is needed to improve balance in daily life and strengthens the relevance of a specific WBA rehabilitation, but it should be borne in mind that correlation does not imply causal relationship.

#### Statistical analysis of recovery

Evaluating change and understanding which factors explain or predict stroke recovery is a very important area of rehabilitation research. Thus, it is important to choose the appropriate statistical method.

A first approach consists of using correlation or linear regression to test the relationship between baseline measurements and change. This method has been used in stroke recovery studies and particularly for upper limb function (57). This led to the "proportional recovery rule" (PRR), which stipulates that most individuals poststroke will recover 70% of their potential (57). However, this

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approach has been criticized because it suffers from a methodological weakness known as "mathematical coupling" (58,59). It occurs when there exists a formulaic relationship between two variables.

A second approach is to categorize the participants into subgroups according to baseline value and to compare the changes across the subgroups. In this study we chose a related approach: we categorize individuals according to their change and compared baseline values. However, this approach is also questionable owing to "regression to the mean", which is defined by the tendency for extremely high or extremely low scores to become more moderate upon retesting over time. Therefore, if participants are divided according to their baseline value, it might give the impression that smaller initial scores will improve more than more moderate initial scores. It can be less of a concern if we are dealing with clinical tests with high reliability.

We might then use Analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) with the final score as response variable, adjusting for baseline scores. However, it has been criticized as being biased in the case of unequal baseline scores between groups (60). This occurs when subjects are grouped according to their characteristics (e.g. gender, stroke side, etc.).

Repeated-measures analysis of variance (RM ANOVA) is another statistical method commonly employed in longitudinal studies. However, this technique requires several and strict assumptions (normality, homogeneity of variance, sphericity) that are often violated and assumes that the participants are assessed at the same points in time. Moreover, the focus of such a design is limited to comparison of group means, and it cannot accommodate analysis at the individual level.

Nowadays, more powerful and flexible statistical methods are used in longitudinal studies, called multilevel models (MLM), which regroup several variations (hierarchical linear models (HLM), linear mixed-effect model (LMM), random-effects models or latent growth curve analysis (LGCA), etc.). These models describe change at both the individual and group levels (61,62). They are more flexible and enable for example the possibility of assessing individuals at different times.

These latter techniques have proved their superiority for the analysis of longitudinal studies including at least 3 assessment sessions (63), but are still underused in rehabilitation research.

### **Study limitation**

Some limitations should be considered when interpreting the results.

Firstly, the main limitation is the retrospective analysis of the data. The DOBRAS cohort was not designed for this present study, which explains why posturographic assessments were not recorded at fixed times, like clinical assessments.

Regarding the selection of the population, because posturography requires being able to stand independently for a few seconds, the patients with the most severe balance disorders can't be included. Due to this functional inclusion criterion (be able to stand independently during 30 s), the participants have been included and assessed at different times post-stroke. Moreover, patients who were discharged home early and who quickly recovered could not be assessed a second time and were not included in this study. Therefore, the results of this study only represent standing balance recovery among a selected subgroup of patients with a first hemispheric stroke.

Concerning the primary study outcome, we used a mathematical formula calculating the absolute degree of WBA, which mixed participants who loaded more weight on paretic side with those who loaded more on non-paretic side. This allows easier comparison of changes. It should be kept in mind, even though a previous study (64) found no differences in clinical profile between these two groups of patients.

Regarding the assessment tools, some of our scores suffer from ceiling effect which could bias the results, particularly when change scores are used.

Additionally, no control group was included. While we are not testing the effect of a treatment, the inclusion of healthy-matched controls would have allowed comparison of results with their reference values, rather than using threshold found in literature.

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Participants followed a personalized rehabilitation program, and thus we can't know exactly how much specific balance rehabilitation they received, which could be a confounding factor. Finally, there may have been a lack of statistical power because of the limited number of subjects included in the study.

## CONCLUSION

This longitudinal observational study investigated weight-bearing distribution during quiet standing twice at 41 (32;70) and 82 (59;95) days post stroke, in a series of 31 patients who all received conventional rehabilitation. Weight-bearing distribution was significantly more symmetric at the second assessment.

Participants who presented a strong recovery of their asymmetry had more severe deficits at first assessment, especially in term of motor command, and so a wider potential for improvement. This shows that even a severe asymmetry with severe deficits and mobility limitations can be reduced after rehabilitation.

Balance ability, assessed by the PASS score, and WBA recovery were closely associated. This suggests that a recovery of WBA is needed to improve balance in daily life and strengthens the relevance of a specific WBA rehabilitation.

However, because of the retrospective analysis and of the small sample size, these findings must be interpreted with some caution and a larger prospective controlled study adjusted on initial severity should be conducted.

## THÈSE SOUTENUE PAR : FOLMER Ophélie

### TITRE :

Weight-bearing asymmetry after stroke: recovery or not?

### **CONCLUSION:**

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## **VU ET PERMIS D'IMPRIMER** Grenoble, le : 12/03/2021

**LE DOYEN** Pour le Président et par délégation Le Doyen de Médecine Pr. Patrice MORAND

**Pr. Patrice MORAND** 

LE PRÉSIDENT DE LA THÈSE



**Pr. Dominic PERENNOU** 

## **TABLES AND FIGURES**

	All patients (n=31)				
Clinical deficits	S1	<i>S2</i>	Δ	р	
Ll motor command	33 (26 ; 38)	36 (29 ; 39)	+1 (0;3)	<10-3	
Ll spasticity	1 (0;3)	1 (0;2)	0 (0;0)	0.205	
Lateropulsion (SCP)	0 (0; 0.75)	0 (0;0)	0 (-0.25;0)	0.003	
Mobility limitation					
Balance ability (PASS)	32 (30 ; 35)	33 (32 ; 36)	+1 (0;2)	<10-3	
Gait independence (mGait-FM)	5 (3 ; 5)	5 (4;6)	0(0;1)	<10-3	

#### Table 1. Evolution of clinical deficits and mobility limitation

S1: first session;  $\Delta$ : difference between the two sessions; L1: lower limb; SCP: Scale for Contraversive Pushing; PASS: Postural Assessment Scale for Stroke; mGait-FM: gait item of modified Fugl-Meyer Assessment' Missing data: L1 motor command (n=1)

#### Table 2. Evolution of posturographic parameters

	All patients (n=31)				
Posturographic parameters	S1	<i>S2</i>	Δ	р	
Absolute WBA (%)	6.8 (3.4 ; 9.7)	4.1 (2.2 ; 8.1)	-1.4 (-4.5 ; 0.9)	0.040	
Instability along ML axis, 2 SD (mm)	9.5 (5.2 ; 13.7)	6.6 (4.2 ; 9.7)	-1.4 (-5.1 ; 0.8)	0.020	
Instability along AP axis, 2 SD (mm)	12.7 (8.5 ; 16.4)	9.6 (8.0 ; 13.1)	-0.7 (-4.2 ;1.0)	0.080	

S1: first session;  $\Delta$ : difference between the two sessions; WBA: weight-bearing asymmetry; ML: medio-lateral; AP: antero-posterior

Table 3. Comparison of baseline characteristics and changes between individuals considered as initially

asymmetric (n=10) according to their WBA recovery

	No or small WBA recovery (n=6)	Strong WBA recovery (n=4)	р
Demographic characteristics			
Sexe, Male (n,%)	2 (33%)	3 (75%)	0.524
Age (years)	72 (64 ; 74)	66 (62;68)	0.257
BMI (kg/m2)	25.2 (2.7)	28.0 (3.4)	0.219
Stroke characteristics			
Stroke type, Infarct (n,%)	6 (100%)	3 (75%)	0.400
Stroke side, Right (n, %)	4 (67%)	3 (75%)	0.999
Clinical deficits			
Ll motor command			
S1	30 (28 ; 32)	20 (17;23)	0.019
$\Delta$	+2 (1;3)	+5 (2;8)	0.443
Ll spasticity			
S1	1 (0;5)	5 (4;6)	0.281
$\Delta$	+0 (-1;0)	+0 (-1;0)	0.548
Lateropulsion (SCP)			
S1	0.13 (0; 0.81)	1 (0.81 ; 1.38)	0.188
$\Delta$	-0.13 (-0.25;0)	-0.63 (-1.13 ; -0.19)	0.314
Neglect, moderate/severe (n,%)			
S1	4 (67%)	3 (75%)	0.999
Mobility limitation			
<b>Balance ability (PASS)</b>			
S1	30 (29 ; 32)	26 (25 ; 27)	0.032
$\Delta$	+2(0;2)	+6 (5;7)	0.018
Gait independence (mGait-FM)			
S1	4 (3 ; 5)	3 (2;3)	0.052
$\Delta$	+1(0;2)	+1(1;2)	0.821

S1: first session;  $\Delta$ : difference between the two sessions; WBA: weight-bearing asymmetry; BMI: Body Mass Index; L1: lower limb; SCP: Scale for Contraversive Pushing; PASS: Postural Assessment Scale for Stroke; mGait-FM: gait item of modified Fugl-Meyer Assessment

## Table 4. Comparison of baseline posturographic outcomes and changes between the individuals considered as

initially asymmetric (n=10) according to their recovery of WBA

	No or small WBA recovery (n=6)	Strong WBA recovery (n=4)	р
Postural characteristics			
Absolute WBA			
S1	10.9 (10.2; 11.5)	17.1 (14.6; 21.4)	0.257
$\Delta$	-1.8 (-2.2 ; -1.4)	-11.3 (-15.6 ; -6.8)	0.010
Instability along ML axis			
S1	9.5 (6.1; 12.4)	12.7 (9.0; 18.0)	0.336
$\Delta$	-1.8 (-2.9; 0.4)	-3.4 (-7.0; 0.0)	0.610
Instability along AP axis			
S1	12.4 (9.7; 13.4)	14.5 (12.8; 16.1)	0.334
$\Delta$	-2.3 (-5.1 ; -0.8)	0.0 (-3.2; 1.5)	0.476
Period time between :			
Stroke-S1	64 (58 ; 75)	95 (75 ; 99)	0.240
S1-S2	33 (27; 39)	62 (38; 88)	0.134

S1: first session;  $\Delta$ : difference between the two sessions; WBA: weight-bearing asymmetry; ML: medio-lateral; AP: antero-posterior



individuals with 2 valid posturography performed at least 14 days apart

Figure 1. Flow chart



## Figure 2. PASS score at first (S1) and second sessions (S2).

Grey represents individuals who have already a satisfactory PASS score (as described in methods) at first session (S1). The others are separated in two groups: those who recovered strongly (as described in the methods) are displayed in green, those who didn't in red. Each dotted line represents an individual. Full lines are the mean of the 3 groups.







Figure 5. Correlations between WBA recovery ( $\Delta$  WBA) and balance recovery, assessed by the PASS score ( $\Delta$  PASS), among the 10 individuals considered as initially asymmetric (R=-0.81; p=0.005).

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## **ADDITIONNAL MATERIALS**

Example of a participant evaluated on a force platform (a.), who decreased his weight-bearing asymmetry between the first (b.) and the second (c.) posturographic session.







Session 2

c.

#### Medical Research Council for muscle strength

- 1 Flicker or trace contraction
- 2 Active movement, with gravity eliminated
- 3 Active movement against gravity
- 4 Active movement against gravity and resistance
- 5 Normal power

#### Modified Ashworth Scale for grading spasticity

Grade	Description
0	No increase in muscle tone
1	Slight increase in muscle tone, manifested by a catch and release or by minimal resistance at the end of the range of motion when the affected part/s is/are moved in flexion or extension.
1+	Slight increase in muscle tone, manifested by a catch, followed by minimal resistance throughout the remainder (less than half) of the ROM.
2	More marked increase in muscle tone through most of the ROM, but affected part(s) easily moved.
3	Considerable increase in muscle tone, passive movement difficult.
4	Affected part(s) rigid in flexion or extension.

ROM, range of motion.

Spatial neglect assessment (a. The Bells Test; b. The Gainotti copy; c. The Fluff test; d. The Catherine Bergego Scale)







	0	1	2	3
1. Forgets to groom or shave the left part of his/her face				
2. Experiences difficulty in adjusting his/her left sleeve or slipper				
3. Forgets to eat food on the left side of his/her plate				
4. Forgets to clean the left side of his/her mouth after eating				
5. Experiences difficulty in looking towards the left				
6. Forgets about a left part of his/her body (eg, forgets to put his/her upper				
limb on the armrest, or his/her left foot on the wheelchair rest, or forgets to	J			
use his/her left arm when he/she needs to)				
7. Has difficulty in paying attention to noise or people addressing him/her				
from the left				
8. Collides with people or objects on the left side, such as doors or furniture				
(either while walking or driving a wheelchair)				
9. Experiences difficulty in finding his/her way towards the left when				
traveling in familiar places or in the rehabilitation unit				
10. Experiences difficulty finding his/her personal belongings in the room or				
bathroom when they are on the left side				
Total score (/30)	)			

d.

0=no neglect; 1=mild neglect; 2=moderate neglect; 3=severe neglect

#### Scale for Contraversive Pushing (SCP)

A	Spontaneous body posture	Sitting	Standing
	1 = severe contraversive tilt with falling to that side		
	0.75 = severe contraversive tilt without falling		
	0.25 = mild contraversive tilt without falling		
	0 = inconspicuous		
	-	Total (ma	x = 2)
В	Use of the nonparetic extremities (abduction & )		
	1 = performed spontaneously, already when at rest		
	0.5 = performed only on changing the position		
	(e.g., on transferring from bed to wheelchair)		
	0 = inconspicuous		
	-	Total (ma	x = 2)
С	Resistance to passive correction of tilted posture <sup>a</sup>		
	1 = resistance occurs		
	0 = resistance does not occur		
		Total (ma	x = 2)

a. Touch the patient at the sternum and the back. Instruction: "I will move your body sidewards. Please permit this movement."

#### Postural Assessment Scale for Stroke Patients (PASS)

Maintaining a Posture

1. Sitting without support (sitting on the edge of an 50-cm-high examination table [a Bobath plane, for instance] with the feet touching the floor)

0=cannot sit

- 1=can sit with slight support, for example, by 1 hand
- 2=can sit for more than 10 seconds without support
- 3=can sit for 5 minutes without support
- Standing with support (feet position free, no other constraints) 0=cannot stand, even with support
  - 1=can stand with strong support of 2 people
  - 2=can stand with moderate support of 1 person
  - 3= can stand with support of only 1 hand
- 3. Standing without support (feet position free, no other
- constraints)
  - 0=cannot stand without support
- 1=can stand without support for 10 seconds or leans heavily on 1 leg

2=can stand without support for 1 minute or stands slightly asymmetrically

3=can stand without support for more than 1 minute and at the same time perform arm movements above the shoulder level

- 4. Standing on nonparetic leg (no other constraints)
- 0=cannot stand on nonparetic leg
- 1=can stand on nonparetic leg for a few seconds
- 2=can stand on nonparetic leg for more than 5 seconds
- 3=can stand on nonparetic leg for more than 10 seconds
- 5. Standing on paretic leg (no other constraints)
- Same scoring as item 4

#### Changing Posture

Scoring of items 6 to 12 is as follows (items 6 to 11 are to be performed with a 50-cm-high examination table, like a Bobath plane; items 10 to 12 are to be performed without any support; no other constraints):

- 0=cannot perform the activity
- 1=can perform the activity with much help
- 2=can perform the activity with little help
- 3=can perform the activity without help
- 6. Supine to affected side lateral
- 7. Supine to nonaffected side lateral
- 8. Supine to sitting up on the edge of the table
- 9. Sitting on the edge of the table to supine
- 10. Sitting to standing up
- 11. Standing up to sitting down
- 12. Standing, picking up a pencil from the floor

## Modified Fugl-Meyer Assessment (mGait-FM)

	Score	Meaning
Needs a human or technical aid	0	Cannot walk
	I	Can take a few steps with the help of 2 persons
	2	Can take a few steps with the help of I person
	3	Can walk with a roller, crutches, or quadripods
	4	Can walk with one stick or one crutch
Walk without a technical aid	5	Can walk without a walking aid, but walks slowly or limps
	6	Can walk at a normal speed for his or her age

Lindmark and Hamrin Walking Scale



## SERMENT D'HIPPOCRATE

En présence des Maîtres de cette Faculté, de mes chers condisciples et devant l'effigie d'HIPPOCRATE,

Je promets et je jure d'être fidèle aux lois de l'honneur et de la probité dans l'exercice de la Médecine.

Je donnerai mes soins gratuitement à l'indigent et n'exigerai jamais un salaire au dessus de mon travail. Je ne participerai à aucun partage clandestin d'honoraires.

Admis dans l'intimité des maisons, mes yeux n'y verront pas ce qui s'y passe ; ma langue taira les secrets qui me seront confiés et mon état ne servira pas à corrompre les mœurs, ni à favoriser le crime.

Je ne permettrai pas que des considérations de religion, de nation, de race, de parti ou de classe sociale viennent s'interposer entre mon devoir et mon patient.

Je garderai le respect absolu de la vie humaine.

Même sous la menace, je n'admettrai pas de faire usage de mes connaissances médicales contre les lois de l'humanité.

Respectueux et reconnaissant envers mes Maîtres, je rendrai à leurs enfants l'instruction que j'ai reçue de leurs pères.

Que les hommes m'accordent leur estime si je suis fidèle à mes promesses.

Que je sois couvert d'opprobre et méprisé de mes confrères si j'y manque.