

Recovery After Stroke: Personality And Behavior Changes

Changes in emotions, feelings and behavior are very common after a stroke. Your brain has been injured, and personality and behavior changes can be a reflection of the damage. Understanding and dealing with these emotional issues are as important as facing physical challenges during recovery.

Depression

Sadness and depression are common feelings after a stroke, but they should not be considered a “normal” part of recovery. Depression can prevent you from moving forward in your recovery process.

- Be familiar with the warning signs of depression. People who are depressed often talk about feeling worthless and tired. They may have changes in their appetite and weight, lose enjoyment in usual activities, and attempt or talk of suicide.

- If you suffer from depression, get help from professional counselors, stroke support groups, and/or family members.

Anger

Having a stroke can be an upsetting, life-changing experience. So it's not surprising to learn that many stroke survivors have feelings of anger and selfishness after their stroke. Not everyone who feels this way deals with it the same. You may talk about or act out your anger. Or you may shut down your emotions and not share your feelings with your loved ones. You may not really even be angry with others. It's important to remember that this behavior is a result of the brain injury.

- Swearing, refusal, boasting, or aggressive behavior are problems for nearly one in five stroke survivors.
- In a study of stroke survivors who didn't have a history of depression, almost one third were unable to control their

anger or aggression after the stroke. Researchers believe the behavior is more a result of brain injury than of post-stroke depression.

Mood Swings / Uncontrolled Emotions

You may have rapid mood swings or outbursts of uncontrolled or exaggerated emotion. This is known as emotional lability or pseudobulbar affect (PBA). If you have PBA, the emotions you show are not related or are out of proportion to how you actually feel.

- PBA can cause impulsive, uncontrolled emotional reactions. You may burst into laughter or tears, for no obvious reason.
- The mood swings and uncontrolled emotions usually happen more often in the first few months after your stroke and then go away slowly over time.
- Although PBA is often confused with depression, it is not. It is key to know the symptoms of PBA and to not mistake them for depression or other psychiatric disorders.

Impulsivity

Behavioral changes vary depending on how serious the stroke was and where in the brain it took place. The right side of your brain controls emotions, how you communicate when you aren't talking (non-verbal communication), and your sense of your own body position (spatial orientation). Damage to this part of the brain can cause many emotional issues, including an impulsive style that can be dangerous.

- Stroke survivors who have had strokes on the right side of their brain don't always know how their brain is damaged. If you have had a right-brain injury, you may not know that you cannot do the things you could before the stroke. You may also experience short attention span, short-term memory loss and poor judgment.
- If you have an impulse, you may be unable to hold back from acting on a thought, such as rising from a wheelchair without checking to see if the brakes are locked.

- **What may help:**

- ✓ Try to maintain a safe environment
- ✓ Keep a day-to-day routine
- ✓ Have family members and caregivers monitor your activities
- ✓ Have family members and caregivers give orders in simple terms and repeat them often
- ✓ Have family members and caregivers point out the effects of the stroke.

Memory Problems/Confusion

Some stroke survivors act as if they remember things that in fact they do not remember. This is known medically as “confabulation” and should not be confused with intentional lying.

In most cases, the “confabulation” is the brain’s way to cope with memory loss caused by stroke damage. People who do this are confused.

- People who “confabulate” are not deliberately lying or trying to mislead. They are genuinely unaware that their memories are inaccurate.
- The problem sometimes disappears over time.

What Can I Do?

Dealing with the personality and behavioral changes that accompany stroke can be difficult for survivors, caregivers and family members, but help is available.

- Ask your doctor about the best treatments and medicines for you.
- Talk to a professional counselor if necessary.
- Get information on stroke recovery from National Stroke Association at www.stroke.org or call (800) 787-6537, or contact your local stroke association.
- Join a stroke survivor support group.
- Have your caregiver join a caregiver support group, if necessary.

Professionals Who Can Help

- Licensed mental health professional
- General physician or doctor

www.stroke.org

Rehabilitation is a lifetime commitment and an important part of recovering from your stroke. Through rehabilitation, you relearn basic skills such as talking, eating, dressing and walking. Rehabilitation can also improve your strength, flexibility and endurance. The goal is to regain as much independence as possible.

**Remember to ask your doctor
“Where am I on my stroke
recovery journey?”**

Note: This fact sheet is compiled from general, publicly available medical information and should not be considered recommended treatment for any particular individual. Stroke survivors should consult their doctor about any personal medical concerns.

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