

Recovery After Stroke: Managing Fatigue

Feeling tired is a common complaint after a stroke. As many as 7 in 10 survivors suffer from fatigue, immediately or within a few months after the stroke. Many stroke survivors describe this fatigue as exhaustion that is unlike anything they have felt in the past. Many say that it includes feeling unable to move or participate in therapy, being unable to think clearly and feeling depressed. It can be frustrating and can slow down recovery. It can even affect those who are doing well after stroke.

Researchers have described post-stroke fatigue as affecting movement, emotions and thinking. Their studies show that this type of fatigue is “usually not ameliorated by rest,” that is, rest does not improve the fatigue. They assert that it is different from the tiredness brought on by exercise which is usually short in duration and recovery. Post-stroke fatigue, according to researchers, includes exhaustion, weariness, and lack of energy.

Fatigue and Health Issues

Stroke-related health issues can sap your strength or energy. If you are managing other medical conditions, you may notice that you don't have any energy left to perform daily activities or participate in family affairs.

Examples of other health conditions that can co-exist with post-stroke fatigue include:

- Heart disease
- Infections caused by not being able to move (such as pneumonia)
- Bladder or bowel problems
- Weight loss caused by changes in eating habits, poor appetite, or swallowing trouble
- Depression or extreme sadness
- Chronic pain
- Muscle weakness or paralysis

What Can Help

Ask your doctor and therapists what you can do to keep or regain your energy. Medicines

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and other treatments may help. But always ask your doctor to explain side effects of any drugs that are prescribed for you. Some drugs may make you tired or worn out.

Talk to your doctor about feelings of depression which may decrease your energy level.

Symptoms of depression include prolonged feelings of sadness, not enjoying things you used to enjoy, not being able to do your daily routine, changes in appetite and changes in sleep patterns. If you are experiencing these, you might benefit from medication to treat depression.

Talk to your doctor about any pain you are experiencing. Pain is a major contributing factor to fatigue. Your doctor may have specific treatments or medications for you to try.

Recognize that fatigue is a genuine symptom after stroke. Although you will tire more easily simply because you have had a stroke, post-stroke fatigue is recognized by physicians as a syndrome affecting between 30% and 70% of stroke survivors. It is not unusual. You are not imagining this.

Don't overdo it. Observe when you have higher energy and plan

important activities at those times. Include rest breaks in your daily schedule.

Do not stop your therapy regimen. Talk to your therapist about your fatigue and ask for a modified schedule of exercises. Ask about energy conservation techniques. Find out what exercises, foods or habits can help restore your strength.

Try not to spend time in bed. Lots of bed rest can result in loss of muscle strength. That will complicate your recovery and extend your recovery time.

The sudden change in blood pressure when you stand up can make you dizzy. Be sure to stand up or get out of bed slowly.

Join a stroke support group. Other survivors will understand your issues and offer support and ideas to help you manage fatigue.

Speak openly and honestly with your caregivers about your fatigue. They'll be glad you did, and together you can work out the best solution.

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Professionals Who Can Help

- A primary care physician or doctor.
- Psychiatrist, a doctor who specializes in physical medicine and rehab.
- Occupational therapist, who helps stroke survivors manage daily tasks.
- Physical therapist, who treats problems with moving, balance and coordination.

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Rehabilitation is a lifetime commitment and an important part of recovering from a 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 information and should not be considered recommended treatment for any particular individual. Stroke survivors should consult their doctors about any personal medical concerns.

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