

Stroke recovery



Emotional Health After Stroke

Your emotional health may change after a stroke. You may have fear, anxiety, anger, sadness, and other feelings. Some of these changes happen because a stroke can damage your brain and nervous system. You may also have these feelings because coping with a change in your health can feel overwhelming.

Depression and other emotional changes can slow your recovery after a stroke. It is important to recognize the symptoms so that you can take steps to strengthen your emotional health.

What are some common emotions after a stroke?

You may have:

- Fear.
- Anxiety.
- Anger.
- Frustration.
- Sadness.
- Feelings of loss or grief.
- Depression.
- Crying or laughing at the wrong time or wrong situation (*pseudobulbar affect*, orPBA).

What are the symptoms of depression?

Depression after a stroke can happen right away, or it can show up later. Symptoms of depression may include:

- Sleep problems.
- Changes in normal eating habits, such as eating too much or too little.
- Weight gain or weight loss.
- Not having energy or enthusiasm (*lethargy*).
- Feeling very tired (*fatigue*).
- Avoiding people and activities (*social withdrawal*).
- Irritability.
- Crying more than usual.
- Mood swings.
- Not being able to concentrate.
- Feeling hopeless.
- Hating yourself.
- Having suicidal thoughts.

What increases my risk of depression?

Having a stroke raises the risk of depression. The risk also goes up if you:

- Are socially isolated.
- Have a family history of depression.
- Have a history of depression or other mental health problems before the stroke.

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- Are unable to work or do activities that you previously enjoyed.
- Need help from others for daily activities.
- Use drugs or drink alcohol.
- Take certain medicines, such as sleeping pills or high blood pressure medicines.

If you ever feel like you may hurt yourself or others, or have thoughts about taking your own life, get help right away. You can go to your nearest emergency department or call:

- Your local emergency services (911 in the U.S.).
- A suicide crisis helpline, such as the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1-800-273-8255. This is open 24 hours a day.

What are some coping methods I can use?

Ask your health care provider for help. Your health care provider may recommend treatments for depression, such as:

- Talk therapy or counseling with a mental health professional. This may include cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) to help change your patterns of thinking.
- Medical therapies, such as brain stimulation or light therapy.
- Lifestyle changes, such as eating a healthy diet and avoiding alcohol.
- Antidepressant medicines.
- Alternative therapies, such as acupuncture, music therapy, or pet therapy.

Other coping strategies you may try include:

- Physical therapy or exercises. Try to do some exercise every day.
- Writing your thoughts in a journal. An example might be keeping track of unrealistic thoughts or keeping a log of things you are thankful for.
- Practicing good sleep habits, such as getting up at the same time every day.
- Following a predictable routine each day.
- Participating in activities that make you laugh.
- Mindfulness therapy. This may include meditation and other techniques to lower your stress.
- Joining a support group for people who are recovering from a stroke. These groups provide social interaction and help you feel connected to others. Your health care team can help you find a support group in your area.

Summary

- Your emotional health may change after a stroke. You may have fear, anxiety, anger, sadness, and other feelings.
- It is important to recognize the symptoms of depression and other emotional problems.
- If you experience emotional changes, let your loved ones know and contact your health care provider.

This information is not intended to replace advice given to you by your health care provider. Make sure you discuss any questions you have with your health care provider.

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Get help right away if you have:

- ▲ A sudden, severe headache with no known cause
- ▲ Nausea or vomiting occurring with another symptom
- ▲ Sudden weakness or numbness of your face, arm or leg, especially on one side of your body
- ▲ Sudden trouble walking or difficulty moving your arms or legs
- ▲ Sudden confusion