

Life after a Stroke

A stroke is a major life event. It can affect different parts of your abilities and your day-to-day life. It affects each person differently. Below are some possible changes that you may experience following a stroke and the members of your healthcare team that can help.



Physical Changes

COMMUNICATION: You may have trouble finding the right words, creating sentences, or reading and writing.

What You Can Do:

- Work with a speech language pathologist (SLP) who can find out which part of your communication is affected and what strategies can improve it.

ARMS AND LEGS: The muscles in your arms, legs, hands, and feet may feel and become very tight (spastic) or become limp and soft (flaccid).

What You Can Do:

- No matter how you get around, it is important to keep safe. Speak with a physiotherapist (PT) or occupational therapist (OT) about assistive devices that can help you move around, such as a walker or wheelchair. They will also teach you how to use them safely.

SWALLOWING/EATING: You may have trouble using your throat muscles to swallow (dysphagia) or your mouth to move food and drink around.

What You Can Do:

- See an SLP, dietitian, and/or OT to help assess your eating and swallowing problems.

DAILY LIVING: You may find it more difficult to bathe, dress, and perform household chores. Safe transportation may also be a challenge.

What You Can Do:

- Speak with your OT about devices and strategies to manage meal times. Tips, techniques, and assistive devices to help with bathing, dressing, and household chores may also be helpful.
- Speak to your doctor, nurse practitioner (NP), or OT about your ability to drive or the status of your license.



Changes in Thinking

EMOTIONS: You may feel down or upset after a stroke. It is also normal to feel a sense of loss. Sadness that does not go away may mean depression.

What You Can Do:

- Find people you can talk to about your feelings. Join or start a support group.
- If any of your feelings become overwhelming, speak with a healthcare professional right away.

THINKING: You may have trouble concentrating on one thing at a time, remembering personal experiences, learning new things, or remembering old information to help you with everyday tasks.

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What You Can Do:

- Speak with an OT about ways you can adapt your tasks to your abilities.

PERCEPTION: You may have vision challenges or lose sensation on the side of your body affected by the stroke. You may also find it difficult to judge the amount of space around you accurately and identify safety issues in your environment.

What You Can Do:

- Speak with your healthcare team about your perception problems to find out who can provide the best support for each problem.



Relationship Changes

RELATIONSHIPS WITH FAMILY: A stroke creates physical and emotional demands on a family. It affects each member of the family differently.

The parent who has had the stroke needs to focus on recovery and may be less able to be the parent they were. Others in the home often take on extra roles and responsibilities.

What You Can Do:

- Be yourself. Do not let the stroke be the focus of your relationship with your family.
- Be supportive. Plan to cope as a family with each problem as it occurs, so the situation does not overwhelm you and your family.
- Maintain routines. Include having fun as part of the routine. It helps to cope with uncertainty.
- If you have children, use their talents. Empower them by hearing what they have to say and by using their ideas to solve problems.

- If you have children, make them part of the team. Involve them in your therapy. Teach them how to handle emergencies. Make sure they know how to respond if another stroke occurs.



Lifestyle Changes

RETURNING TO WORK AND FINANCIAL

CHALLENGES: The stroke may have left you unable to do the job you used to do or unsure of which job you would be able to do based on your current abilities.

What You Can Do:

- Your PT can support you in returning to work and can assess your readiness and re-integration plan. Your doctor or NP can work with your employer to support you in transitioning back to your job.
- Speak with an OT about ways to adapt your workplace to your abilities or programs that provide retraining and support.
- If going back to your previous job is not an option, a social worker can help support you through career change decisions and/or other financial resources.

Helpful Web sites

Ontario Social Services

<https://www.mcsc.gov.on.ca/en/mcsc/programs/social>

After Stroke (March of Dimes)

<https://www.afterstroke.ca>

