

Let's Talk About Emotional Changes After Stroke

How can stroke change my life?

Immediately after a stroke, a survivor may respond one way, yet weeks later respond differently. Some survivors may react with understandable sadness; others may be amazingly cheerful. These emotional reactions may occur because of biological or psychological causes due to stroke. These changes may vary with time and can interfere with rehabilitation.



What emotional changes are biological?

Emotions may be difficult to control, especially soon after a stroke. There are two common emotional responses caused by biological changes.

Emotional lability, also called “reflex crying” or “labile mood,” can cause:

- Rapid mood changes — a person may “spill over into tears” and then quickly stop crying or may start laughing.
- Crying or laughing that doesn't match a person's mood.
- Crying or laughing that lasts longer than seems appropriate.

Post-stroke depression is characterized by:

- Feelings of sadness
 - Hopelessness or helplessness
 - Irritability
 - Changes in eating, sleeping and thinking
- Treatment for post-stroke depression may be necessary. Don't hesitate to take antidepressant medications prescribed by your doctor.

What emotional reactions are psychological?

Post-stroke psychological emotions are “natural.” They're part of adjusting to the changes brought by a stroke. Often, talking about the effects of the stroke and acknowledging these feelings helps stroke survivors deal with these emotions. Some common psychological reactions to stroke are:

- Frustration
- Anxiety
- Anger
- Apathy or not caring what happens
- Lack of motivation
- Depression or sadness






How can I cope with my changing emotions?

- Tell yourself that your feelings aren't "good" or "bad." Let yourself cope without feeling guilty about your emotions.
- Find people who understand what you're feeling. Ask about a support group.
- Get enough exercise and do enjoyable activities.
- Give yourself credit for the progress you've made. Celebrate the large and small gains.
- Learn to "talk" to yourself in a positive way. Allow yourself to make mistakes.
- Ask your doctor for help. Ask for a referral to a mental health specialist for psychological counseling or antidepressant medication if needed for depression.
- Make sure you get enough sleep at night. Sometimes lack of sleep can cause emotional changes.

How can I learn more?

- Talk to your doctor, nurse or other healthcare professionals. Ask about other stroke topics. This is one of many *Let's Talk About Stroke* fact sheets.
- For more information about stroke, or to get more fact sheets, call the American Stroke Association at 1-888-4-STROKE (1-888-478-7653) or visit us online at StrokeAssociation.org.
- If you or someone you know has had a stroke, call the American Stroke Association's "Warmline" at 1-888-4-STROKE (1-888-478-7653), and:
 - ✓ Speak with other stroke survivors and caregivers trained to answer your questions and offer support.
 - ✓ Get information on stroke support groups in your area.
 - ✓ Sign up to get *Stroke Connection*, a free magazine for stroke survivors and caregivers.

What are the warning signs of stroke?

-  **Sudden weakness or numbness of the face, arm or leg, especially on one side of the body**
-  **Sudden confusion, trouble speaking or understanding**
-  **Sudden trouble seeing in one or both eyes**
-  **Sudden trouble walking, dizziness, loss of balance or coordination**
-  **Sudden, severe headaches with no known cause**



Learn to recognize a stroke.
Because time lost is brain lost.

Today there are treatments that may reduce the risk of damage from the most common type of stroke, but only if you get help quickly — within three hours of your first symptoms.

Call 9-1-1 immediately if you experience these warning signs!

Do you have questions for your doctor or nurse?

Take a few minutes to write your own questions for the next time you see your healthcare provider:

What can my family do to help me when I am emotional?

Is there a stroke support group in my area?

Will these emotional changes improve over time?



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