

Tip Sheet # 2



What is a Stroke and What to Expect at Home

What is a stroke?

Having another stroke within 5 years is common. See Tip Sheet #1: The Warning Signs of Another Stroke.

There are two main types of stroke. An **ischemic stroke** results from lack of blood flow to the brain. A **hemorrhagic stroke** is from bleeding in the brain.

- **Ischemic Stroke**

- This kind is due to a blood clot or plaque build-up in the brain.
- The blood clot or plaque build-up blocks a blood vessel in the brain.
- Blood flow is then cut off to that part of the brain.
- Damage is done because that part of the brain does not have enough blood flow.
- The blood clot could form in the brain slowly over time or could be formed elsewhere in the body and travel to the brain.
- The plaque build-up in the blood vessels in the brain commonly results from high cholesterol.
- Sometimes a drug can be given that can break up a clot if it is given very soon after the stroke.
- Sometimes a clot or plaque in a large vessel can be removed, but sometimes it is a small vessel and cannot be removed.

- **Hemorrhagic Stroke**

- This kind of stroke is due to a blood vessel breaking in the brain.

- The broken vessel bleeds into the brain and causes damage.
- Damage is done because of the amount of blood causing pressure in the brain or the blood irritating other blood vessels.
- Broken blood vessels in the brain commonly result from blood vessel disorders (e.g., aneurysms), blood thinners (e.g., Warfarin Sodium, commonly known as Coumadin), street drugs (e.g., Cocaine), or uncontrolled high blood pressure.
- Sometimes surgery can be done to help control the bleeding.

What happens when the stroke occurs on the right side of the brain?

- A stroke on the right side of the brain may cause movement problems on the left side of the body.
- There may be problems with judging distance, size of objects, speed or position. This might cause falls, bumping into things, or trouble picking things up, buttoning shirts, or tying shoes.
- There may be vision problems.
- People with a right sided stroke may make poor decisions. They may act without thinking. They might take the wrong action in doing things. Safety can be a concern.
- There may also be short-term memory problems. A person with a right sided stroke may forget important things, like turning off the stove.

What happens when the stroke occurs on the left side of the brain?

- A stroke on the left side of the brain can cause movement problems on the right side of the body.
- People with a left sided stroke may have speech and language problems.

- There can also be vision problems.
- A left sided stroke may cause the person to become slow and cautious. They may need feedback and reassurance.
- There may also be short-term memory problems. They can forget things as well.

What happens when the stroke occurs somewhere else in the brain?

- Strokes that occur on the right or left side of the brain are the most common.
- Sometimes a stroke can occur somewhere else in the brain.
- The lists above for strokes that occur on the right or left side of the brain are not always the same for all stroke survivors. Other problems can occur after a stroke.

What kind of changes can I expect in the survivor?

- The survivor may have some of these common problems.
 - Weakness on one or both sides of the body.
 - Paralysis on one or both sides of the body.
 - Ignoring or forgetting the weak or paralyzed side of the body. This is called, “***neglect.***”
 - Difficulty with speech, language, or swallowing.
 - Vision problems.
 - Loss of emotional control:
 - Crying or laughing at the wrong time.
 - Rapid changes in emotion.

- Mood changes
 - Depression.
 - Lack of motivation.
 - Frustration or anger.
- Changes in memory, decision-making or problem solving
- Behavior changes:
 - Personality changes.
 - Improper words or actions.
 - Saying the same word over and over.



How can I as a caregiver help with the changes my survivor is having?

- Try to learn about how the stroke has changed the survivor so that you can learn how to help.
- **Work with therapists and nurses.** Try to attend as many therapy sessions as possible. Ask the therapists and nurses to teach you how to provide care and how to best help the survivor.
- **Don't take the survivor's changes personally.** Many changes in the survivor's behaviors and activities may be upsetting to you. Many of these changes are caused by damage to areas in the brain. The survivor may say and do things because of the stroke, not because of something you said or did.
- **Take care of yourself.** If you get sick or too stressed, you may not be able to take care of the survivor.

What can I expect at home?



Bringing the survivor home after stroke can be challenging. The survivor may have trouble getting around the house. You may need to change your routine and how things are done at home. The survivor may need outside help and resources. Life may be very different at home after stroke for both you and the stroke survivor.

Ideas to help make the home handicap accessible

- **Have a therapist visit your home** to recommend things like grab bars, ramps, bathroom equipment, and other things to make it easier for the survivor to get around.
- **Ask the therapist** about who could install ramps, grab bars, or who can widen doorways. Get references from all workers. Visiting hardware stores may help. Many of their workers are insured and guarantee their work.
- **Ask an occupational therapist** about assistive devices to help the survivor become more independent. For example, long shoehorns, grabbers, certain tableware like rocker knives, non-skid placemats, etc.
- **Ask a physical therapist** about assistive devices such as walkers, canes, leg braces, gait belts, or other equipment to help the survivor get around.
- **Think about a call button** or walkie talkies or intercom systems for the survivor to use to call for help when they are in another room.
- **See Tip Sheet #20** for tips about learning how to help the stroke survivor walk, transfer to a wheelchair, move about, or avoid falls.
- **See Tip Sheet #21** for tips about assisting the stroke survivor with bathing, dressing, or going to the bathroom.

Ideas about how to find extra help for the survivor.

- **Ask a social worker or the hospital case worker** about how to find outside help for bathing, dressing, or for someone to stay with the survivor while you are out. Check with your insurance company or with Medicare to see what they cover.
- **Think about adult day care** if the survivor is not able to stay alone and if you need to get out. Many adult day cares also provide therapy. Many survivors find it helpful to get out of the house and socialize with others.
- **Look at Tip Sheet #8 Where to find resources** for telephone numbers and websites of organizations that can help with care. There are also books, magazines, videos, and other resources listed there.
- **Look at the Table of Contents at the front of this notebook** to look for other tip sheets that may be helpful to you as you need them.



When do I need to call the doctor, nurse or therapist?

- Call with any questions you have.
- Call if there are any changes for the worse.
- Call 911 if you think your survivor is having another stroke. **See Tip Sheet #1 Warning Signs of Stroke.**

Where do I find more information?

- Talk with your doctor, nurse or therapist.
- American Stroke Association's "Warmline" at 1-888-4STROKE (or 1-888-478-7653). www.strokeassociation.org

- Sign up to get *Stroke Connection Magazine*, a free magazine for stroke survivors and caregivers. Call the “Warmline” to sign up.
- Look for books at your local library or bookstore.

Recommended Books

Senelick, R.C. (2016). *Living with Stroke: A Guide for Patients and Their Families* (Fifth Edition). Birmingham: Healthsouth Press. ISBN 978-1891525186.

Jorgensen, L. (2021). *The Caregiver’s Guide to Stroke Recovery: Practical Advice for Caring for You and Your Loved One*. Emeryville, California: Rockridge Press. ISBN 978-1-64876-577-3.