

Tip Sheet # 7



Which Health Professionals to Call for Advice

There are so many professionals involved in the care of the stroke survivor. Who do I call for what?

First, you need to figure out exactly what your questions are. **Skill-Building Tip Sheet SB5. Communicating with health professionals** gives several strategies for how to ask good questions. It also helps you find ways to overcome common difficulties with asking questions like:

- Not feeling comfortable talking with doctors or other professionals
- Getting told different things by different people
- Trying to get past someone to talk directly to the doctor or the professional you are trying to call
- Forgetting questions once you get to the doctor or professional
- Not understanding big words or medical terms being used by doctors and other professionals
- Feeling too emotional to focus on what is being said

The main idea of Skill-building Tip Sheet #SB5 is to get you to prepare your questions ahead of time so that you can ask what you want in an effective manner.

This **Tip Sheet #7 Which health professionals to call for advice** is about figuring out who you should call for specific questions. Once you have your questions worded the way you want, it is best to make sure you are asking the right person.



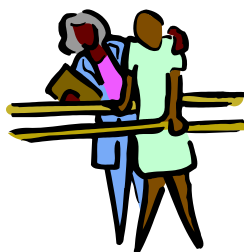
How can I as a caregiver know which person does what? Who do I call? There are many people who may be involved in the care of the stroke survivor. ***Many health professionals work together as a team to help plan the survivor's care.*** Check out the table below to see what each professional does and sample questions that you might ask them. Write the name and telephone number of each professional that your survivor sees in the table below so that you will know how to reach them. You may not have all of these professionals involved in the survivor's care. Just write the name and telephone numbers of those who are.

Professional	Sample Questions	Name and Phone
Neurologist – This is the doctor who takes care of the survivor after the stroke. They might prescribe medications to prevent another stroke or to control stroke symptoms. After a few clinic visits, the neurologist usually doesn't see the survivor unless they have any neurological complications.	"What are warning signs of stroke, and should we call 911?" (Yes!) "What symptoms should we call you for?" "Are there any medications the survivor should take to prevent another stroke?" "Are there side effects from the medications that we should worry about?" "When does the survivor need to come back for an appointment?"	Name: Phone:

Physiatrists or Rehabilitation Neurologists – These doctors specialize in rehabilitation. They prescribe medicines and therapies for the survivor.	“What therapies do you recommend for the survivor?” “Are there any medications or treatments that will help the survivor recover quicker?” “What can I do as a caregiver to help the survivor recover quicker?”	Name: Phone:
Family doctor or primary care doctor – This is the doctor who probably took care of the survivor before the stroke. They might also see the survivor after the stroke.	“Should the survivor be taking the same medicines they were before the stroke?” “How often does the survivor need to come to you for an appointment?”	Name: Phone:
Hospital Nurse – This is a nurse who took care of the survivor when they were in the hospital.	“Who were we supposed to have an appointment with after leaving the hospital?” “What information do you have on the survivor’s medications, diet, exercise, or therapies that we should be doing?”	Name: Phone:

Rehabilitation Nurse – This is a nurse who cared for the survivor during their rehabilitation. They often work on a rehabilitation unit in a hospital.	“What medical supplies or other equipment are needed for home care?” “Who will we need to come visit us when we are home? A home care nurse? Therapist?” “Is there a 24-hour line that we can call to ask questions?”	Name: Phone:
Home Care Nurse – This is a nurse who visits your home to care for the stroke survivor. They look at how the survivor is doing. They also consult with the doctor to see if there are any changes in medicines or therapies that should be made.	“Do we need to monitor the survivor’s blood pressure?” “Would you go over the survivor’s medicines with me so I know what they are and when they are to be given?” “When should we notify you? Any symptoms that we should call you about?”	Name: Phone:





Physical therapist – This is the therapist who helps the survivor learn how to walk, transfer from bed to wheelchair, or move about.	“What can I do as a caregiver to help the survivor walk, transfer, or exercise?” “What exercises should the survivor be doing? How often and how long?” “How do I keep from hurting myself while lifting or supporting the survivor?”	Name: Phone:
Speech therapist – This is the therapist who helps the survivor learn how to speak or communicate again. They also help the survivor with swallowing problems.	“How can I as a caregiver help the survivor communicate?” “What can we do about swallowing?” “Are special foods or exercises needed to make swallowing easier?”	Name: Phone:

Occupational therapist – This therapist helps the survivor learn activities of daily living... like learning how to cook again, drive a car, or how to get dressed. This therapist often helps survivors with hand, arm, or shoulder problems.	“What can I do as a caregiver to help the survivor become more independent?” “Any suggestions you have on how to help the survivor ____ on their own?” “Is there any assistive equipment that can help the survivor? Where can I find stores in my area for assistive equipment?”	Name: Phone:
Recreational therapist – This therapist helps the survivor find enjoyable activities after stroke.	“The survivor used to ____ as a hobby. How can I help them learn how to do it again?” “Any ideas on what we can do for fun now that the survivor has had a stroke?” “What can I do to make going out less stressful?”	Name: Phone:



Psychiatrist – This is a physician who specializes in mental health. They prescribe medications and counseling for the survivor. They also treat depression.	“The survivor is just not the same person anymore. They _____?” “I think the survivor is depressed. What can I do to help? Are there any medications that can help?”	Name: Phone:
Neuropsychologist, psychologist, or counselor – The neuropsychologist is most focused on testing and evaluating cognitive and emotional functioning after stroke. Psychologists or counselors help the survivor deal with the emotional effects of stroke.	“Are there any support groups that we can attend?” “Do you recommend counseling for the survivor?” “Who can I go to as a caregiver to help me manage my own stress?” “How can I help the survivor feel better emotionally?”	Name: Phone:
Social workers or case managers – Social workers and case managers help to hook the survivor up with resources in the community.	“What home care agencies can you recommend for us?” “Please explain what our insurance will and will not cover for home care.”	Name: Phone:

	“What adult day care programs or respite care programs can you recommend?” “Are there any support groups in our area?” “Who can we contact if we have financial issues or questions?” “Where can we get mental health or family counseling?”	
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When should I call for advice?

- **Call 911** if you notice any warning signs of stroke.
 - Sudden **numbness or weakness 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 headache** with no known cause

Another way to recognize a stroke is BE FAST

B- Balance – Loss of balance?

E- Eyes – Loss of vision in one or both eyes?

F- Facial drooping or numb? Ask the person to smile.

A- Arm weakness or numb? Ask the person to raise both arms.

S- Speech difficulty or slurred? Ask the person to say “The sky is blue.”

T- Time to call 911. Note the time when symptoms first noticed, and the time when they were “last seen well.”

- Call your doctor for any emergency.
- Call the doctor or nurse for any new problem.
- Call if you have questions about any problems.
 - Physical problems such as pain, eating, walking, bowel or bladder problems
 - Emotional problems such as anger, sadness or anxiety
 - Financial problems, especially if you have trouble paying for medicine or health care

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.