Tip Sheet #13

Dealing with the Stroke Survivor's Problems with Thinking

What are problems with thinking?
Many stroke survivors have problems with thinking after a stroke. Damage to the brain can cause many problems. Here are some common problems with thinking:

- Loses or forgets things
- Get's distracted easy or can't focus on a task
- Can't concentrate or solve problems
- Can't make decisions
- Has poor judgment or makes unsafe decisions
- Get's lost or wonders off
- Get's confused about what is going on
- Can't remember important people or events

How can I as a caregiver help with problems with thinking?

- **If the survivor is only mildly impaired,** talk to them about your concerns. See if there are things you can do to help them stay independent. Make memory aids, calendars, or post reminders of important things or events. Try to work together as a team.

- **Think of ways to make communication easier.** Ask short questions and make short requests. Keep sentences simple. Make eye contact with the survivor while talking to them. **See Tip Sheet #14 Communicating with the Stroke Survivor** for more ideas on how to communicate better. Talk directly to the survivor. Speak slowly. Give the survivor time to respond. Avoid talking about the survivor as if they are not there.

- **Make the environment as safe as possible.** Put away clutter, keep furniture in the same places, put away items that could be dangerous. Ask an occupational therapist for ideas.

- **Make a daily routine and stick to it.** Try to make a schedule for meals, personal care, exercises, therapy sessions, social activities, and relaxation. A daily routine is less confusing for the survivor.

- **Avoid overstimulation.** Too many activities going on at the same time, too much noise, too many people, etc. can be overwhelming. Try to keep things simple. Participate in activities as the survivor is able to tolerate.

- **Have an identification necklace or bracelet made for the survivor.** If the survivor wanders off, you will want them to have identification on them. One place you can look is MedicAlert 1-888-432-5378, www.MedicAlert.org.

- **Consider door chimes if your survivor wanders.** Door chimes or bells can be installed to your front and back doors to alert you if your survivor is going outside. Check with places like Radio Shack or Best Buy.

- **Keep the survivor active.** Allow them to do as much as possible for themselves. Involve them in activities such as cooking, dishes, folding laundry, or other things they are able to do safely.

- **Get plenty of rest.** Plan activities when the survivor is well rested. Doing things in the morning may be better than in the evening when the survivor is tired.

- **Try brain stimulating activities.** Listen to music, take up a hobby together, take a walk together, try some computer games, word games, puzzles, board games, etc. There is a book that may be helpful for caregivers and survivors who want ideas on activities to do:

Sheridan, C. (1987). Failure-free activities for the Alzheimer's patient: A guidebook for caregivers and families. New York: Dell Publishing. ISBN 0-440-50605-0.

Try to adjust activities to fit survivor's attention span. Try to pick things that are not too tiring, but that are challenging and interesting.

- **Look for books or resources that can help.** One book that is very helpful for many caregivers is a classic:

Mace, N.L. & Rabins, P.V. (2017). The 36-Hour Day: A guide to caring for persons with Alzheimer's Disease, Related Dementing Illnesses, and Memory Loss in Later Life. (6th Edition). Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press.

This book has many suggestions on how to take care of persons with thinking problems, memory impairment, and other mental health issues. You can find it at your local library, bookstore, or on Amazon.com.

- **Look for ways to manage emotions and difficult behaviors.** There are several tip sheets in this notebook that can help.
  - **Tip Sheet #9 Dealing with the survivor's emotions**
  - **Tip Sheet #10 Dealing with the survivor's feelings about him or herself**
  - **Tip Sheet #12 Dealing with the survivor's changed personality**
  - **Tip Sheet #11 Dealing with difficult behaviors**
  - **Skill-Building Tip Sheet #SB6. Stress Management Workbook for Caregivers and Survivors.**

- **Last, but not least, take care of yourself.** As a caregiver, you need plenty of rest and time away from the survivor. Check out these tip sheets to take care of your own needs:
  - **Tip Sheet #27 Dealing with my own emotions**
  - **Tip Sheet #29 Finding the best way to ask family and friends for help**
  - **Tip Sheet #31 Taking care of my own health**

- **Tip Sheet #26 Finding care while I am away**
- **Skill-Building Tip Sheet #SB6. Stress Management Workbook for Caregivers and Survivors.**
- **Skill-Building Tip Sheet #SB7. Goal setting: Taking Care of your health.**

When do I need to contact a professional?

● Call you doctor or nurse if you notice any sudden changes in thinking or memory. Call for any questions that you might have.

Where do I find more information about problems with thinking?

● Call you doctor, rehabilitation nurse, or occupational therapist

● Call the American Stroke Association's Toll-Free Warmline: 1-800 478-7653 or log onto their website: www.StrokeAssociation.org

● Call the National Stroke Association at 1-800-STROKES (1-800-787-6537) or log onto their website: www.stroke.org

● Call the Family Caregiver Alliance 1-800-445-8106 or log onto their website: www.caregiver.org

● Check out **Tip Sheet #8 Where to Find Resources** for more ideas.

References

Mace, N.L. & Rabins, P.V. (2017). The 36-Hour Day: A guide to caring for persons with Alzheimer's Disease, Related Dementing Illnesses, and Memory Loss in Later Life. (6th Edition). Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press.