



CARING FOR SOMEONE WITH EMOTIONAL & BEHAVIORAL NEEDS

Coping with Emotional Changes

Emotional or mood changes are common after a stroke. It is “normal” for stroke survivors to have many different feelings. Some people are sad because they have trouble walking or talking. Other people seem cheerful and happy because they survived.

What are Common Emotional Changes after Stroke?

Keep in mind that not all stroke survivors have the same feelings. Below are common changes that may occur. You are the key to recognizing emotional changes that are problems. Get help quickly.

Changes in feelings:

- Feeling worthless
- Depression or sadness
- Lack of motivation or drive
- Being overly sensitive
- Anxiety or worry
- Frustration

Changes in behaviors:

- Angry outbursts
- Crying or laughing at the wrong things
- Losing one's temper
- Trouble caring for self or others

What Do You Need to Know?

Emotional changes in your loved one are real. Expect that things will get better.

Most emotions are normal after a stroke, but watch for these two **Red Flags**:

🚩 Red Flag: Suicide and Stroke

If the stroke survivor talks about suicide, has thoughts of suicide, or attempts suicide, get help right away. **Call emergency services or your healthcare provider.** This is a serious problem.

🚩 Red Flag: Rapid Mood or Emotional Changes

Rapid mood changes are crying out of control one minute and then quickly laughing without reason. Another example is crying or laughing at the wrong things. **Talk to your healthcare provider right away.**

What Treatments Should You Discuss with Your Healthcare Team?

The stroke survivor and family members may explain away the person's moods. You, as the caregiver, must make sure that your loved one gets treatment. There are many good treatments for emotional changes. These treatments may speed up your loved one's recovery.

- Medicines, such as anti-depressants, improve symptoms and reduce rapid mood changes.
- Psychotherapy (talk therapy) is used along with medicines. Talk therapy gives your loved one a safe place to talk about feelings.
- Support groups provide help from other stroke survivors and caregivers. They know what you and your loved one are going through. There are support groups for stroke survivors and caregivers like you.

Helpful Tips

- Encourage your loved one to exercise and take part in fun activities.
- Be patient with your loved one. It will take time to adjust to the changes.
- Allow time to talk about negative and positive feelings.
- Encourage family and friends to visit.
- Focus on what your loved one can do. Smile and relax about things you can't change.

Remember

- Watch for signs and symptoms of difficult emotional changes. Talk with your healthcare team right away.
- Exercise and do fun activities with your loved one.
- Be patient. Laugh and talk with your loved one.

More Resources

The following resources contain internet links. The location of internet pages can change. Therefore the links provided may not always work. For the most current version of this list, go to <http://www.rorc.research.va.gov/rescue/resources>. This page will be updated frequently.

Link Disclaimer: Links to information and Web sites outside of the Department of Veterans Affairs do not indicate an endorsement of products or services offered by the sites. In addition, these sites may have privacy and security policies that are inconsistent with those of VA.

American Stroke Association

Web: <http://www.strokeassociation.org>

Phone: 1-888-478-7653

The American Stroke Association has fact sheets to help with caring for someone with emotional and behavioral needs. They have information on “How Stroke Affects Behavior: Our Guide to Physical and Emotional Changes.” Go to this link: <http://www.strokeassociation.org/presenter.jhtml?identifier=9064>

Caregiver Library

Web: <http://www.caregiverslibrary.org>

Phone: 1-804-327-1111

The Caregiver Library has several fact sheets on dealing with emotional issues after stroke. Go to this link: <http://www.caregiverslibrary.org/Default.aspx?tabid=73>

Eldercare Locator

Web: <http://www.eldercare.gov>

Phone: 1-800-677-1116

The Eldercare Locator helps you find resources in your loved one’s area. It can also find your local Area Agency on Aging. The Area Agency on Aging helps you assess your loved one’s needs and find services. This organization helps you find ways to pay for care.

For more information on stroke caregiving, visit the RESCUE home page:
<http://www.rorc.research.va.gov/rescue>

Family Caregiver Alliance

Web: <http://www.caregiver.org>

Phone: 1-800-445-8106

The Family Caregiver Alliance provides fact sheets on caregiving issues and strategies. This includes a fact sheet on “Coping with Behavioral Problems After Head Injury.” Some information also available in Spanish. For a list of fact sheets, go to this Web site:

<http://www.caregiver.org/caregiver/jsp/publications.jsp?nodeid=345>

The Family Caregiver Alliance has a fact sheet for caregivers on how to deal with trouble behavior. Although it addresses dementia, the helpful tips can be applied to caring for stroke survivors as well. Go to this link:

http://www.caregiver.org/caregiver/jsp/content_node.jsp?nodeid=391

My HealthVet

Web: <http://www.myhealth.va.gov>

My HealthVet has information on VA services, strokes and caregiving.

To take a screening test for symptoms of depression:

- Go to: <http://www.myhealth.va.gov>
- Click on the button that says “Enter Here”
- Click on “Research Health” on the top bar, then “Mental Health”
- Click on “Depression Screening (PHQ-9)”

Also visit the Caregiver Assistance Center on the My HealthVet Web site. This section provides more information on caregiving.

- Go to: <http://www.myhealth.va.gov>
- Click on the button that says “Enter Here”
- Click on “Research Health” on the top bar, then “Healthy Living Centers”
- Click on “Caregiver Assistance”

National Stroke Association

Web: <http://www.stroke.org>

Phone: 1-800-787-6537

The National Stroke Association has information on many different stroke topics. They have information on “Recovery After Stroke: Coping With Emotions.” Go to this link:

http://www.stroke.org/site/DocServer/NSAFactSheet_Emotions.pdf?docID=990

For more information on stroke caregiving, visit the RESCUE home page:

<http://www.rorc.research.va.gov/rescue>

Stroke Association (United Kingdom)

Web: <http://www.stroke.org.uk>

The United Kingdom Stroke Association has an A-Z list of fact sheets. This includes information on the psychological effects of stroke, cognitive problems and communication problems after stroke. Go to this link:

http://www.stroke.org.uk/information/our_publications/factsheets/az_factsheets_list.html

Note: This Web site offers helpful information for caregivers, but some references may not apply to caregivers in the United States.

References: American Stroke Association. (2008). Retrieved July 11, 2008, from: <http://www.americanheart.org/presenter.jhtml?identifier=3047697>; Family Caregiver Alliance. (2008). Retrieved July 11, 2008, from: <http://www.caregiver.org/caregiver/jsp/publications.jsp?nodeid=345>



These materials were created for the project:

Web-Based Informational Materials for Caregivers of Veterans Post-Stroke

Project Number SDP 06-327 funded by VA HSR&D Quality Enhancement Research Initiative (QUERI)

