

RESCUE



Resources & Education for Stroke Caregivers'
Understanding & Empowerment

CARING FOR SOMEONE WITH EMOTIONAL & BEHAVIORAL NEEDS

Apathy (Lack of Motivation)

Apathy is a lack of motivation or enthusiasm. This is different from being tired or depressed. A stroke survivor who has apathy shows little emotion or feeling. The survivor may withdraw from friends and family. They may seem passive or indifferent to life.

What Do You Need to Know?

Stroke survivors with apathy often lose interest in daily activities. They may show lack of concern for personal care. They may have trouble beginning and finishing tasks. You may think that your loved one is lazy or uncaring. Your loved one does not act this way on purpose. Apathy is the result of the stroke injury.

Why Is It Important to Get Help?

Apathy is one of the most difficult behaviors to handle. You may be stressed by your loved one's need for constant help. Your loved one may not express thanks for your care. Talk with your healthcare team. Some medicines are helpful.

Neuropsychologists, occupational therapists and nurses can suggest ways to help your loved one. Think about joining a support group to talk with other caregivers.

What Treatments Should You Discuss with Your Healthcare Team?

Some medicines improve apathy. Your provider may prescribe a medicine that is used to treat depression. Medicines that stimulate the brain may be helpful. Drugs that treat dementia and Parkinson's disease are other options. Speak to your healthcare team about ways to handle apathy.

What Are Ways You Can Motivate Your Loved One?

- Prompt or cue your loved one to do activities. Be direct. Offer simple choices. Avoid asking your loved one if they want to do something. Simply state that it is time to do a task like take a bath.
- Keep a daily routine or schedule.

- Find tasks that your loved one can do without help. Allow your loved one plenty of time to do tasks.
- Praise your loved one often. Show your support regardless of the quality of the activity.

How Can You Get Your Loved One Interested in Activities?

- Invite your loved one to take part in favorite activities you both enjoy. Talk about the past. Look at old photos.
- Ask friends and family to visit.
- Do things to increase your loved one's cooperation. Make daily activities fun. Use humor often.
- Offer a reward like a favorite food for finishing a hard task.

Helpful Tips

Stay calm – Dealing with apathy is frustrating. Things will go more smoothly if you are relaxed.

Remind yourself that apathy is part of the disease – Your loved one is not trying to be difficult.

Try to change what you expect of your loved one – Remember that your loved one cares about you. They just have trouble showing love and feelings.

Remember

- Your loved one may seem lazy or uncaring. Keep in mind that your loved one's behaviors are part of the disease.
- Frequently prompt or cue your loved one to begin and complete tasks.
- Increase social activities. Talk about the past. Invite family and friends to visit.

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. Learn about “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>

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>

My HealthVet (MHV)

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

My HealthVet (MHV) provides trusted information on stroke and other health conditions. It also provides resources for stroke caregivers and tools to track your loved one’s health.

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”

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

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

References: Landes, A.M., Sperry, S.D, Stauss, M.E., & Gledmacher, D.S. (2001). *Apathy in Alzheimer's disease. Journal of American Geriatrics Society*, 49(12), 1700-1707; Orr, W.B. (2004). Apathy in the older adult: why you should care. *Geriatrics*, 59(7), 34-36.



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