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Patient Education:

Emotional Health After Stroke

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Your emotional health may change after a stroke. You may have fear, anxiety, and other feelings. Some of these changes happen because a stroke can damage your brain and nervous system. You may also have these feelings because coping with a change in your health can feel overwhelming.

Depression and other emotional changes can slow your recovery after a stroke. It is important to recognize the symptoms so that you can take steps to strengthen your emotional health.

What are some common emotions after a stroke?

You may feel:

- Fear.
- Anxiety.
- Anger.
- Frustration.
- Sadness.
- Loss or grief.

You may cry or laugh at the wrong time or in the wrong situation (*pseudobulbar affect*, or *PBA*).

How to recognize symptoms of depression

Depression is common after a stroke. It can happen right away, or it can show up later.

Symptoms of depression may include:

- *Physical changes, such as:*
 - *Sleep problems.*
 - *Weight gain or weight loss.*
 - *Not having energy or enthusiasm (lethargy).*
 - *Feeling very tired (fatigue).*

- *Emotional changes, such as:*
 - *Irritability.*
 - *Crying more than usual.*
 - *Mood swings.*
 - *Feeling hopeless.*
 - *Hating yourself.*
 - *Having suicidal thoughts.*

- *Behavioral changes such as:*
 - *Avoiding people and activities (social withdrawal).*
 - *Not being able to concentrate.*
 - *Changes in eating habits, such as eating too much or too little.*

What increases my risk of depression?

Having a stroke raises the risk of depression. The risk also goes up if you:

- *Are socially isolated.*
- *Have a family history of depression.*

- *Have a personal history of depression or other mental health problems before the stroke.*
- *Are unable to work or do activities that you previously enjoyed.*
- *Feel dependent on others for daily activities.*
- *Use drugs or alcohol.*

What are some coping methods I can use?



Ask your health care provider for help. He or she may recommend treatments for depression, such as:

- *Counseling with a mental health professional to help with depression and stroke recovery.*
- *Medical therapies, such as brain stimulation or light therapy.*
- *Lifestyle changes, such as eating a healthy diet and avoiding alcohol.*
- *Antidepressant medicines.*
- *Alternative therapies, such as meditation, acupuncture, music therapy, or pet therapy.*

Other coping strategies may include:

- *Physical therapy or exercises every day to help you with movement.*
- *Writing your thoughts in a journal. An example might be keeping track of negative*

thoughts or keeping a log of things you feel grateful for.

- *Practicing good sleep habits, such as going to bed and getting up at the same time every day.*
- *Following a routine each day.*
- *Participating in activities that make you laugh.*
- *Mindfulness therapy. This may include meditation and other techniques to lower your stress.*
- *Joining a support group for people who are recovering from a stroke. These groups provide social interaction and help you feel connected to others. Your health care team can help you find a support group in your area.*

Where to find more information

American Stroke Association: www.stroke.org

Contact a health care provider if:

- *You have emotions and feelings that deepen and are cause for concern.*

Get help right away if:

- *You feel hopeless.*
- *You have thoughts of hurting yourself or someone else.*
- *You feel suicidal.*

If you ever feel like you may hurt yourself or others, or have thoughts about taking your own life, get help right away. Go to your nearest emergency department or:

- ***Call your local emergency services (911 in the U.S.).***

- ***Call a suicide crisis helpline, such as the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1-800-273-8255 or 988 in the U.S. This is open 24 hours a day.***
- ***Text the Crisis Text Line at 741741 (in the U.S.).***

Summary

- *Your emotional health may change after a stroke. You may have an increase in fear, anxiety, anger, sadness or other feelings.*
- *It is important to recognize the symptoms of depression and other emotional problems and to seek help from professionals.*
- *Lifestyle changes, counseling, physical therapy, and exercising can help you cope with the effects of stroke and help you stay as emotionally healthy as possible.*

This information is not intended to replace advice given to you by your health care provider. Make sure you discuss any questions you have with your health care provider.