

Recovery After Stroke: Social Support

Socializing with family and friends is an important part of stroke recovery. But as a stroke survivor, you may have trouble doing the very things that allow you to connect with other people – talking on the phone, understanding what people say, writing letters, taking walks, shopping, getting around or eating out. This can make you feel disconnected and alone at a time when you need more social support than ever before.

Feeling Good About Yourself

Having a stroke is a major setback. With all the changes in your life since the stroke, you may find it hard to feel good about yourself.

But, getting back your self-esteem is important. Self-esteem affects the way you do things for yourself and your willingness to do the things you like. The better you feel about yourself, the more you will do. And the more you do, the better you will feel.

Some tips that may help:

- Make the most of your rehabilitation. Through rehab, you regain independence. And, doing things on your own again will make you want to re-claim your social life.
- Don't be so hard on yourself. Recognize and celebrate any and all progress.
- Work towards a "new normal" instead of trying to do everything you used to do.
- Don't overdo it. Allow time for rest.

Getting the Support You Need

Everyone needs support. And, stroke survivors are no exception. There are many ways to get the support you need.

A support group allows you to interact with other stroke survivors who know what you are going through. People in a support group can:

- Help you find ways to solve problems related to your stroke.
- Share information about products that may help your recovery.
- Encourage you to try new things.
- Listen to your concerns and frustrations.
- Give you a chance to get out of the house.
- Give you a chance to share your story.
- Become your new friends.

Friends and family can also provide support.

They can:

- Involve you in their activities.
- Encourage you to join community recreation programs or support groups.
- Arrange for you to attend social gatherings and fun activities.
- List all the phone numbers of the people you care most about, allowing you easy access to them when you need it most.
- Help you buy and write cards or letters to send to people.
- Give you rides to social events.

Some people may not be comfortable with you. They may even avoid spending time with you. Sadly, this is not uncommon. Some tips that may help:

- Try not to take this personally. People are often uncomfortable with things they know little about.
- Take this opportunity to teach others about stroke and how it has affected you.
- Ask for what you need. If you have trouble ordering food in a restaurant, ask your friends and family to help you.

Going Places

So you're in a wheelchair or sporting a cane or walker. So what? Getting out is good for you. It gives you a chance to be with other people. And each time you successfully go places, you build up your confidence to do it again.

- Be sure to plan your outing in advance.
- If you are unable to drive, get a ride with friends and family. Or, call a local bus company to arrange a ride or use public transportation.

What Can Help

- Accept that your body has changed and realize that you can still be active, productive and have a good quality of life.
- Stay involved with the people and activities you enjoy most.
- Look for opportunities to do something worthwhile or fun.
- Volunteer with local events or non-profit organizations.
- Call on the support of people or devices to help you function in your changed body.
- Get information on stroke recovery from National Stroke Association. Visit www.stroke.org or call 1-800-STROKES (1-800-787-6537).

- Check with your local hospital or rehab program, a senior center, or your local stroke association for a list of resources in your area.
- Join a stroke support group. Other survivors will understand your issues, and offer support and ideas for social interactions.
- Speak honestly with your family about your social needs. They'll be glad you did, and, together, you can work out the best solution.

Professionals Who Can Help

- Case manager – helps you facilitate follow-up to hospital care, coordinate care from many different people, and find local resources
- Social worker – helps you make decisions about rehab programs, where you will live, insurance, and support services in the home
- Discharge planner – helps you prepare to live independently in the home

Rehabilitation is a lifetime commitment and an important part of recovering from a stroke. Through rehabilitation, you relearn basic skills such as talking, eating, dressing and walking. Rehabilitation can also improve your strength, flexibility and endurance. The goal is to regain as much independence as possible.

Remember to ask your doctor, “Where am I on my stroke recovery journey?”

Note: This fact sheet is compiled from general, publicly available medical information and should not be considered recommended treatment for any particular individual. Stroke survivors should ask their doctors about any personal medical concerns.