

UNDERSTANDING HOW POST-STROKE FATIGUE AFFECTS YOUR LOVED ONE

Just because someone is home from the hospital does not mean that all is normal and they are running on all cylinders. Their brains have been injured, and it takes time and the compassion and patience of friends for them to recover.

It is important to let survivors respond to this situation in their own way, without trying to meet the expectations of others who have not experienced a brain injury.

What to Understand About Post-Stroke Fatigue

- It is extremely common. As many as 70 percent of stroke survivors experience fatigue.
- Post-stroke fatigue can happen whether there has been any exertion or not.
- Post-stroke fatigue doesn't always get better after a survivor takes a break, or gets rest.
- Sometimes there may be outwardly noticeable signs of fatigue, other times there may not.
- Some fatigue may be a side effect of medication.
- Post-stroke fatigue is unpredictable. Some survivors experience good days and bad days. For some it is all day, every day.
- Some survivors may be doing well then suddenly "hit a wall."
- For some, "hit the wall" episodes may decrease over time, but they still may generally feel that they don't have the energy to do what they want and need to do.
- As a survivor tires:
 - they may become clumsy
 - their speech may be affected
 - their ability to understand, comprehend or recall may be compromised
 - they may get irritable
 - they may experience increased emotional lability (crying or laughing with no apparent trigger)

- People who have made otherwise remarkable recoveries still may not be able to return to work because of post-stroke fatigue.

What Can Help

- If energy is better at a certain time of day, take advantage and plan activity around that.
- For mental fatigue, sitting quietly with low sensory stimulation (keep noise, light and activity in the area to a minimum) may be better than a nap.
- Schedule regular rest breaks or even a nap if needed.
- Factor in fatigue before any event or activity as well as recuperation time after an event or activity.
- Survivors with fatigue should be conscientious about maintaining energy reserves, rather than pushing themselves into exhaustion.

Family members and friends can help by coming from a position of compassion and understanding rather than the expectation that everything *should* be better. Others can't always see it, but post-stroke fatigue can be quite limiting.

