

UNDERSTANDING HOW POST-STROKE DEPRESSION 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 and family 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. It may not be possible to understand how they feel.

What to Understand About Post-Stroke Depression

- It is extremely common. Studies document that between one-third and two-thirds of stroke survivors experience depression.
- It can result from the stroke lesion itself. It may also be a reaction to their stroke deficits. Or it may be both.
- It can stymie recovery because it may prevent them from participating in therapy.
- It increases risk of another stroke.
- It generally responds well to treatment, which typically is a combination of medication and talk therapy.
- It is not a character flaw or moral failing.
- It is unlikely to go away by itself.

Things your loved one may be thinking and feeling when experiencing post-stroke depression:

- “I don’t have the words to tell you what’s wrong. I really don’t, and I feel bad about it.”
- “I’m not in control and I’m confused.”
- “I feel like a burden. I was independent. I’m not now and it makes me sad.”

- “I don’t know what would help me feel better. But keep loving me.”
- “I feel unlovable. I don’t love myself. Touch heals. Hug me.”
- “Life can’t go back to the way it was and neither can I. I’m changed. I didn’t choose to change. I don’t want to change. I can’t deal with any more change.”

What Can Help

Family members and friends can help by coming from a position of compassion and understanding, rather than the expectation that everything should be better. Stroke support groups help both survivors and caregivers accept the new normal that stroke has brought to their family.

