

# Surviving Stroke's Effects



**M**ore than 700,000 people in the United States sustain a stroke annually, according to the American Heart Association. If you're one of them, rehabilitation is an important part of your recovery. Keep in mind, though, that it's hard work. Tasks that were easy to do before your stroke will be more difficult. But they are possible. The following are tips on dealing with obstacles you'll probably face during recovery.

## GETTING DRESSED

A stroke often affects movement and use of one side of your body, which makes getting dressed difficult. Assistive devices, such as stocking/sock spreaders, rings attached to zipper pulls and buttonhooks can help. Clothing also may be easier to handle if it features elastic fasteners, elastic waistbands, snaps and grippers, and elastic shoelaces. In addition to using these devices, you should:

- Lay out your clothes in the order you'll put them on, placing those you plan to put on first on top.
- Sit down while you dress to prevent falls.
- Clothing first; to undress, remove the stronger arm or leg from clothing first.

## BODY AWARENESS

After a stroke, some people have problems with body awareness. For instance, people with right-sided paralysis may forget about the right side of their body. To avoid this:

- Make an effort to look at, move and touch your affected side.
- Ask your friends and family to sit next to your affected side when they talk to you. Also ask them to pass your food from that side.
- Some people, especially those who don't have feelings in an arm or leg, have trouble recognizing body parts on their affected side. If you do, ask someone to question you about that side. For example, they can say, "show me your right hand," or "Where am I touching you?"

## SPEECH ISSUES

Some people develop speech and language problems after a stroke, especially if it affects their right side. These problems may involve and or all aspects of language, such as speaking, reading, writing and understanding spoken words. Tips for dealing with speech and language problems include:

- Ask people to speak directly to you using short, simple sentences.
- To help you understand them, ask people to use gestures, point or write notes.
- When people speak to you, watch their lips move.
- If weak face muscles cause you slur words, ask your doctor about speech therapy.
- If other people have trouble understanding your words, ask them to tell you when they don't understand

## BLADDER CONTROL

About half of all stroke survivors experience urinary incontinence. Causes include infection, constipation and the effects of medications. If you have problems controlling your bladder, ask your doctor to:

- Help you develop a schedule of regular bathroom use

- Educate you about protective clothing or pads
- Discuss preventive medications, such as anticholinergics or antispasmodics.
- Other methods to prevent bladder leakage include emptying your bladder at regular intervals and controlling your liquid intake.

## EATING NORMALLY

Many people have difficulty swallowing after having a stroke, which increases the risk of choking. If a swallowing is hard or you sometimes choke, tell your doctor. You may need further tests or therapy.

Following are more tips for eating after a stroke:

- Eat foods that smell good. Aromatic, sweet or salty foods stimulate the production of saliva in your mouth, which will help you swallow.
- Try drinking juice if you have trouble swallowing water. The taste of juice helps you know that liquid is in your mouth, so you're less likely to choke. But don't drink citrus juices, such as orange juice. It can be irritating and may have pulp, which could increase your chances of choking.
- Eat foods at room temperature because you may be oversensitive to hot or cold.
- Avoid sticky foods, such as peanut butter, syrup and bananas; they can be hard to swallow.
- Avoid dry foods that are hard to swallow, such as crackers, rice, popcorn and toast.

Besides choking, many people who have had a stroke may find it difficult to use a knife and fork. Talk to your nurse or therapist about assistive devices, such as large-handled silverware, which can make eating easier.

Stroke can cause many difficulties. But with education, motivation and help of trained professionals, you can achieve independence. ■

*Adapted from <http://content.health.msn.com:80/encyclopedia/article/3053.1196>*