



Resources & Education for Stroke Caregivers'
Understanding & Empowerment

CARING FOR SOMEONE WITH EMOTIONAL & BEHAVIORAL NEEDS

Depression After Stroke

After a stroke, your loved one may have many negative feelings. Your loved one may think that things will never get better. This is not true – help is available!

Almost half of all stroke survivors have depression. Depression is a normal response to the losses that occur from a stroke.

What Are the Signs and Symptoms of Depression?

Here is a list of the signs and symptoms of depression. Five or more of these signs or symptoms that last more than two weeks are warning signals for depression.

- Sadness or an “empty” mood
- Feeling guilty, worthless or helpless
- Problems concentrating, remembering or making decisions
- Appetite and/or weight changes
- Feeling hopeless
- Lack of energy or feeling tired and “slowed down”
- Problems with sleep, such as trouble getting to sleep, staying asleep or sleeping too much
- Feeling restless or irritable
- Loss of interest or pleasure in hobbies and activities, including sex, that were once enjoyed

🚩 Red Flag: Suicidal Thoughts

If the stroke survivor talks about suicide, has thoughts of suicide, or attempts suicide, get help right away. **Call emergency services or your healthcare provider.** This is a serious problem.

What Do You Need to Know?

Depression is real – People need help when they have depression.

Physical and emotional changes are common after a stroke – Accept your loved one's changes.

Expect improvements over time – Things often get better.

Why Is It Important to Get Help?

Treatment of depression will help the stroke survivor recover faster. It will make your job as a caregiver easier. For instance, treating depression helps with:

- Thinking skills and memory
- Physical recovery and rehabilitation
- Language and speech
- Emotions and motivation

What Treatments Should You Discuss with Your Healthcare Team?

Get help from your healthcare team quickly. The stroke survivor and family members may explain away the person's depression. Make sure that the stroke survivor receives treatment.

- Medicines, such as anti-depressants, improve symptoms.
- Psychotherapy (talk therapy) is used along with medicines. Talk therapy gives your loved one a safe place to talk about feelings.
- Support groups provide help from other stroke survivors and caregivers. They know what you and your loved one are going through. There are support groups for stroke survivors and caregivers like you.

Helpful Tips

- Know the warning signals of depression. Watch for the signs and symptoms of depression. Get help quickly.
- Be patient with your loved one. After a stroke, it will take time for your loved one to understand the changes.
- Help your loved one exercise and take part in fun activities.
- Encourage friends and your family to visit and talk with your loved one.
- Have a good attitude. Focus on how much your stroke survivor can do. Smile and relax about things you can't change.

Remember

- Depression is real and should be treated.
- You are the key person to watch for the warning signals of depression.
- Get help quickly if you think your loved one has depression.

More Resources

The following resources contain internet links. The location of internet pages can change. Therefore the links provided may not always work. For the most current version of this list, go to <http://www.rorc.research.va.gov/rescue/resources>. This page will be updated frequently.

Link Disclaimer: Links to information and Web sites outside of the Department of Veterans Affairs do not indicate an endorsement of products or services offered by the sites. In addition, these sites may have privacy and security policies that are inconsistent with those of VA.

Caregiver Library

Web: <http://www.caregiverslibrary.org>

Phone: 1-804-327-1111

The Caregiver Library has several fact sheets on dealing with emotional issues after stroke. Go to this link: <http://www.caregiverslibrary.org/Default.aspx?tabid=73>

Eldercare Locator

Web: <http://www.eldercare.gov>

Phone: 1-800-677-1116

The Eldercare Locator helps you find resources in your loved one's area. It can also find your local Area Agency on Aging. The Area Agency on Aging helps you assess your loved one's needs and find services. This organization helps you find ways to pay for care.

My HealthVet

Web: <http://www.myhealth.va.gov>

My HealthVet has information on VA services, strokes and caregiving.

To take a screening test for symptoms of depression:

- Go to: <http://www.myhealth.va.gov>
- Click on the button that says "Enter Here"
- Click on "Research Health" on the top bar, then "Mental Health"

For more information on stroke caregiving, visit the RESCUE home page:

<http://www.rorc.research.va.gov/rescue>

- Click on “Depression Screening (PHQ-9)”

Also visit the Caregiver Assistance Center on the My HealthVet Web site. This section provides more information on caregiving.

- Go to: <http://www.myhealth.va.gov>
- Click on the button that says “Enter Here”
- Click on “Research Health” on the top bar, then “Healthy Living Centers”
- Click on “Caregiver Assistance”

References: American Stroke Association. (2008). *Depression Trumps Recovery*. Retrieved June 16, 2008, from: <http://www.strokeassociation.org/presenter.jhtml?identifier=3030377>.; and Robinson, RG, et al. (2008). Escitalopram and problem-solving therapy for prevention of post-stroke depression: a randomized controlled trial. *JAMA*, 299(20): 2391-400.



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