



strokefoundation

# Emotional and personality changes after stroke

## Fact Sheet

Call StrokeLine **1800 STROKE** (787 653)

### Summary

- Changes in mood and personality are common after a stroke.
- These changes can make it hard for you to do your usual activities and manage your day-to-day life.
- It is important that you talk to your health professional/s and family/friends about changes in your mood or personality.
- It is also common for carers and family members to experience changes in mood after your stroke. The information in this fact sheet is relevant for them too.
- Treatment can include medication and psychological interventions which includes support and strategies to manage thoughts and behaviours.

### How does a stroke affect my feelings and emotions?

You may experience a range of feelings after your stroke. You may feel relieved that you are alive. You may feel angry that you had a stroke. You may feel confused about why you had a stroke or about what is happening to you. You may feel sad about what has happened or frightened about the future. A stroke can have a big effect on your life and cause a number of changes. It is very normal to have any of these feelings.

Your family members, friends or carers may also feel anger, resentment, guilt, frustration, impatience and/or depression. Having some or all of these feelings is normal. These feelings will usually get better with time. However your family, friends and carers should seek support from their doctor if these feelings do not improve.

After your stroke you may experience more long-lasting emotional or mood problems. Mood problems are common at any stage after a stroke and can often be treated. The most common mood problems are depression and anxiety.

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## Depression

- People with depression feel sad, down or miserable most of the time and/or lose interest or pleasure in most of their usual activities. It is not just a low mood. It is a treatable illness.
- People with depression find it hard to do their usual activities and manage their day-to-day lives.
- Being depressed can affect your recovery from stroke.
- Depression is common after stroke. However there are treatments that can help.

[See the Depression after stroke fact sheet for more information.](#)

## Anxiety

People with anxiety feel nervous, worried or stressed on most days for an extended period of time (at least six months). It is more than feeling worried, stressed or anxious from time-to-time.

This worry can affect your everyday life. It can cause you to:

- feel edgy/restless.
- feel tired.
- have difficulty concentrating.
- develop muscle tension (sore back, neck or jaw, headache).
- find it hard to fall/stay asleep.

It is important to talk to your health professional if you have any of these problems.

## How might a stroke affect my personality?

Personality and/or behavioural changes are also common after stroke. The way that you think, feel and act may be different than before the stroke. These changes can lead to problems joining in community activities. Personality and/or behavioural changes can include:

- Irritability. You may become impatient, annoyed or angry more easily than usual. You may react to things that would not normally upset you.
- Aggression. You may behave in a hostile or destructive manner. This may be physical (such as hitting or biting) or verbal (such as yelling or swearing).
- Perseveration. You may repeat or get stuck doing certain actions or behaviours. For example repeating the same word or sentence over and over again.
- Apathy. You may feel indifferent or have a lack of interest about things that would have mattered to you before the stroke. For example, a favourite activity or taking care of your appearance.
- Emotional lability. Some people have sudden mood swings or uncontrollable emotions for no reason. Sometimes you may cry or laugh uncontrollably, even though you do not know why you are doing it.
- Disinhibition. You may find it difficult to stop doing things that are socially inappropriate. For example you may talk about embarrassing topics with strangers.
- Impulsivity. You may find it hard to control urges or act without thinking. Or you may do things that are unsafe or inappropriate.

## What can I do to help manage emotional and personality changes?

Talk about your feelings with your family and friends. If you have any mood changes that last for more than two weeks and interfere with your daily activities you should talk to a health professional. Health professionals that you can talk to include your doctor, social worker, occupational therapist or clinical psychologist/neuropsychologist.

Your health professional will talk to you and do some assessments. This is to work out your individual problems, and how they affect your daily life.

Treatment for mood problems or personality changes will vary depending on your individual needs. Treatments may include:

- Psychological interventions. This may include training in problem solving or cognitive-behavioural therapy (CBT). How people think about certain things can affect how they feel. CBT helps to change the way that you think about these things to change the way you feel.
- Behavioural management strategies. For example, anger-management training.
- Medications. For example, anti-depressants may be used if you have depression.
- Information. Your health professional should provide both you and your family with information and education.

## Tips for family, friends or carers

- Remind yourself that feeling anger, resentment, guilt, frustration, impatience and/or depression is normal.
- Try not to feel guilty or ashamed about having these feelings.
- Try not to take these feelings out on your loved one. It is not his or her fault that they had a stroke.
- Talk with a friend, family member or health professional (like a social worker, counsellor, occupational therapist, doctor or psychologist).

## Where can I get help?

Talk to a health professional – your doctor, social worker, occupational therapist, clinical psychologist or neuropsychologist.

Visit the *beyondblue* website for information about depression.

[www.beyondblue.org.au](http://www.beyondblue.org.au)

Phone 1300 224 636

For a list of general practitioners with experience in treating mental health conditions (such as depression or anxiety) you can click on 'Find a Doctor' within the *beyondblue* website.

The websites below list mental health professionals who provide psychological treatments for which you may be able to claim a Medicare rebate (sometimes a doctor's referral is needed first).

To find a psychologist;

[www.psychology.org.au/findapsychologist](http://www.psychology.org.au/findapsychologist)

To find an occupational therapist;

[www.otaus.com.au/find-an-occupational-therapist](http://www.otaus.com.au/find-an-occupational-therapist)



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We have offices in Brisbane, Sydney, Hobart and Perth.

**Call StrokeLine 1800 STROKE (787 653)**

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