

Feeling Emotional After a Stroke

Having a stroke can be scary and stressful. It can happen very fast and have long-lasting effects on a person's life. Stroke survivors respond with a range of emotions. Some people may be very sad, while others may seem quite cheerful. These emotions are part of coping.

Emotions may change over time. The way a person responds right after a stroke can be very different to how they respond weeks or months later. Knowing what to expect will help you to cope with the effects of the stroke. It will also help others to understand what you are going through.

Why Emotions Change After a Stroke

Some changes happen because of how the stroke affected your brain. Some change because of how the brain injury has affected you and your life.

Changes in the Brain

When a stroke happens, the brain is injured. The effects depend on where the brain was injured. If the parts that handle emotions are injured, it changes the way the brain deals with them. Emotions may be hard to control after a stroke. Mood swings and depression are very common.

- **Mood swings:** A person might have rapid mood changes. You might hear this called emotional lability, reflex crying, or labile mood. For example, a person might suddenly cry but then quickly stop or even start laughing. During a mood swing, crying may not fit a person's mood. This often improves over time.
- **Post-stroke depression:** People may feel sad, powerless, inadequate, or irritable. Mild depression is more common with damage in the right/back area of the brain. Severe depression is more common with damage in the left/front area of the brain. Talk with your team about treatment if needed.

Common Feelings After a Stroke

A stroke may affect a person's life in many ways. This is very emotional for all involved. The type and extent of feelings are related to the stroke, your coping style, and how you coped in the past. Common feelings are frustration, anxiety, and anger. Some feel sad or do not care about things as much as before.

Many of these feelings are a natural part of adjusting to life after a stroke. Talking about the effects of the stroke and your feelings can help you and your family work through and process feelings. This is an important step in the process of this life change.

Your health care team may have given you this information as part of your care. If so, please use it and call if you have any questions. If this information was not given to you as part of your care, please check with your doctor. This is not medical advice. This is not to be used for diagnosis or treatment of any medical condition. Because each person's health needs are different, you should talk with your doctor or others on your health care team when using this information. If you have an emergency, please call 911. Copyright © 4/2025. University of Wisconsin Hospitals and Clinics Authority. All rights reserved. Produced by the Department of Nursing HF#6305