Depression after a Stroke

Grief and feelings of loss are common after many illnesses. Dealing with life after a stroke involves adjustment. As you or a loved one learns to deal with changes in your lives, you may have feelings of sadness, anxiety, frustration or anger. When sadness changes into depression, it is important to seek help.

Depression is a common emotional reaction to stroke. Sometimes, depression is caused by the physical damage that stroke causes in the brain. Depression can start right after a stroke, during rehabilitation, or after you go home. Some studies suggest that people who have had a stroke are at greatest risk for depression 6 months to 24 months after they leave the hospital.

Depression can hamper recovery and rehabilitation. Talk to your doctor if you are feeling depressed or sad.

Signs of depression

When a person is depressed, he or she has several signs nearly everyday that last at least 2 weeks.

Use this list to check (✓) off any signs you or a loved one has had for 2 weeks or more:

- Increased frustration, irritability or grouchiness
- Loss of interest and pleasure in activities you used to enjoy
- Feeling sad, blue, empty or down in the dumps
- Crying more than usual

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- Feeling slowed down or restless and unable to sit still
- Feeling worthless or guilty
- Feeling pessimistic or hopeless
- Feeling anxious or worried
- Changes in appetite or weight loss or gain
- Change in sleep patterns – being unable to sleep or sleeping too much
- Problems concentrating, thinking, remembering or making decisions
- Withdrawing from people / events you normally enjoy
- Loss of energy or feeling tired all of the time.
- Sexual problems

If you have any of these signs for more than 2 weeks, or if you have had thoughts of suicide or of trying to harm yourself or others, see your doctor.

**What can be done to prevent depression?**

- Learn about stroke. Information can help lessen your fears. Talk to your health care professionals about your questions and concerns.
- Make the most of rehabilitation and keep track of your progress. The more you recover, the better you will feel.
- Spend time with family and friends. Talk about your feelings.
- Maintain interests and hobbies.
- Exercise.
- Do not drink alcohol.
- Talk to a health care professional as soon as you notice signs of depression.

**Where can I get help in dealing with depression?**

- When you are in the hospital or rehabilitation, talk with a psychologist, social worker, doctor, nurse or therapist. They can provide or recommend help for you.
After discharge, call your family doctor, social worker or discuss your problems with your neurologist.

In an emergency, call 911 or go to or call the OSU Emergency Department at (614) 293-8333.

Treatment for depression includes counseling, medicines or both. If you start medicines for depression, do not stop taking them without talking to your doctor.

Other resources

• **Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance**
  - 1-800-826-3632
  - [www.dbsalliance.org](http://www.dbsalliance.org)
  - Information about kinds of depression, treatment, local resources, and online support and discussion boards.

• **HandsOn Central Ohio** (formerly First Link)
  - To get help or give help, call 211, 24 hours a day.
  - For administrative help, call (614) 221-6766, Monday – Friday, 8:00 am to 5:00 pm, or email at info@handsoncentralohio.org.
  - More information can be found at their web site at [www.handsoncentralohio.org/public/](http://www.handsoncentralohio.org/public/).
  - Staff makes referrals to human services in Central Ohio.

• **Mental Health America**
  - 1-800-969-6642
  - [www.mentalhealthamerica.net](http://www.mentalhealthamerica.net)
  - Information about the causes and treatment of clinical depression and how to find local resources in your area.

• **National Institute of Mental Health**
  - 1-866-615-6464, 1-866-415-8051 (TTY)
  - [www.nimh.nih.gov](http://www.nimh.nih.gov)
  - Information and free booklets on depression and treatment and an interactive mental health services locator.
• National Stroke Association
  ➤ 1-800-787-6537
  ➤ www.stroke.org
  ➤ Fact sheet about depression after stroke and support group locator.

24 Hour Services
National Suicide Prevention Lifeline………1-800-273-TALK (8255)
Netcare Crisis Hotline...........................................................(614) 276-2273
North Central Mental Health Services,
  Suicide Prevention 24-hour Hotline..............................(614) 221-5445

Talk to your doctor or others on your health care team if you have questions. You may request more written information from the Library for Health Information at (614) 293-3707 or email: health-info@osu.edu.