

# Understanding Strokes



*“Leading the Way To Recovery”*

Imagine losing the ability to move one of your arms, remember the names of friends or speak clearly; that’s the reality for people who have suffered a stroke.

Strokes affects more than 700,000 Americans each year and constitutes the largest source of long-term adult disability in the United States, according to the American Heart Association. Rehabilitation can help survivors become more independent. With rehab interventions patients can perform progressively more complex tasks such as bathing, dressing and using the toilet on their own.

It’s important to learn the types and degrees of disability that can result from a stroke. This condition can affect five main areas: mobility, sensory systems, language, memory and emotions.

## *Notes:*

*Your doctor or therapist has given you this patient education handout to further explain or remind you about an issue related to your health.*

*This handout is a general guide only. If you have specific questions, discuss them with your doctor or therapist.*

## **MOBILITY:**

Strokes often causes paralysis on one side of the body and can affect the face, arms, legs or an entire side. Stroke patients with one-sided paralysis often find it difficult to accomplish daily activities such as walking or grasping objects. Some people have problems swallowing if a stroke damages the part of the brain that controls the swallowing muscles.

If a stroke affects your lower brain, or cerebellum, it can affect your body’s ability to coordinate movements. This can lead to problems with posture, walking and balance.

## **SENSORY SYSTEMS:**

After a stroke you may lose the ability to feel pain, temperature or anything you touch. Sensory deficits may also hinder the ability to recognize objects, even your own limbs. Some people experience pain, numbness, tingling or pickling sensations in paralyzed or weakened limbs.

People who survive a stroke frequently develop chronic pain syndromes which are the result of stroke-induced damage to the nervous system (neuropathic pain). People who have a seriously weakened or paralyzed arm commonly experience moderate to severe pain that radiates outward from the shoulder. This pain develops because tendons and ligaments around a joint become immobile after a stroke.

These sensory and motor deficits can also cause urinary incontinence. For instance, you may lose the ability to sense the need to urinate or control bladder muscles. Some people may lack mobility and can't reach the toilet in time. Loss of bowel control or constipation can also occur.

**LANGUAGE:**

More than one-fourth of stroke survivors experience language impairments which hinder the ability to speak, write and understand language. People who experience damage to a language center on the dominant side of the brain have trouble conveying thoughts with words or writing. If there's damage to a language center in a rear portion of the brain, it may be difficult to understand spoken or written language or speak coherently. Although you can form grammatically correct sentences they might not have meaning.

You may also develop global aphasia and lose linguistic abilities. In this scenario, you can't understand language or use it to convey thoughts.

Finally, a stroke may cause anomic or amnesic aphasia, where you forget interrelated groups of words such as the names of people or objects.

**MEMORY:**

A stroke can damage memory, awareness and the capability to learn. You may develop a short attention span or have short-term memory deficits. You can lose the ability to make plans, comprehend meaning, learn new tasks or engage in complex mental activities.

Two common deficits that result from a stroke are the inability to acknowledge the reality of physical impairments and an inability to respond to objects or sensory stimuli located on one side of the body.

**EMOTIONS:**

You may feel fear, anxiety, frustration, anger and sadness. Some of these emotional disturbances result from a stroke's physical effects on the brain. Signs of clinical depression include sleep disturbances, sudden weight loss or gain, lethargy, social withdrawal, irritability, fatigue, self-loathing and suicidal thoughts.

A stroke can cause a plethora of disabilities. With education, motivation and the help of clinicians, stroke survivors can achieve independence.

**Rehabilitation Services Managed By:**

