

ORGANIZATION NEWS

Information/Education Page



Understanding Mental Health Needs After Mild Stroke

Each year approximately 305,000 people in the United States have a mild stroke.¹ A mild stroke occurs when a doctor identifies a lesion in a person's brain using a brain scan, but the person is still able to do everyday activities, such as getting dressed.²

After a mild stroke (even months or years later), you may experience mental health conditions due to brain damage caused by the stroke or the stress of being in the hospital. Your mental health is just as important as your physical health. If you are experiencing mental health concerns, it is important that you get the help you need. This handout is designed to help people with mild stroke and their care partners identify and get appropriate care for mental health conditions following a mild stroke.

How can I recognize mental health concerns?

People with mental health conditions report feeling not like themselves. If you are experiencing mental health problems, you might feel sad, unmotivated, tired, or anxious. While everyone feels some of these emotions from time to time, you should seek help if you experience signs or symptoms of a mental health condition over several weeks, if your mental health impacts your ability to do your regular activities, or if you notice changes in your personality. [Table 1](#) describes the signs and symptoms of different mental health conditions that commonly affect people after mild stroke.

Is it possible to have more than 1 mental health condition?

Yes, it is possible to have more than 1 mental health condition because these conditions are often

interrelated. For example, if you are not sleeping well, you may feel fatigued and depressed. Also, the experience of having a stroke can be stressful and can worsen existing mental health conditions.

Toughing it out vs getting help

It is important to recognize that mental health concerns are common among stroke survivors and nothing to be ashamed of. Having a stroke is a both major life event and a disruption in brain activity. Having mental health concerns is not a sign of weakness or cause of shame. It just means you need a little extra help. Never be ashamed to get the help and support you need. Talk to your health care provider know if you are experiencing mental health concerns.

What will my health care provider do?

To diagnose a mental health condition, your health care provider may ask you some questions or have you fill out a survey to determine if you have a mental health condition. Sometimes, they may refer you to another health care professional like a psychologist, psychiatrist, neurologist, or counselor. Learn more about mental health conditions and take online screenings using resources like <http://www.mentalhealthamerica.net/mental-health-screening-tools>.

What is the treatment for mental health conditions?

The good news is that treatment can help people with mental health conditions feel better. There are a variety of treatment options available to you depending on your symptoms. Talk to your

health care professional about what treatments might be right for you. Treatments range from exercise or attending a support group to intensive talk therapy with a mental health professional or medication changes.

Table 2 describes some of the different treatments your help care team might recommend to address your mental health concerns. It is important to note that mental health treatments can take several weeks to start working. Once started, mental health treatment should not be stopped without talking to the health care team.

What should I do in a mental health crisis?

A mental health crisis is when a person feels like hurting themselves or someone else. If you are having a mental health crisis, you should get help immediately. You can talk to a friend or family member or a trusted health care professional. If you want to talk to someone anonymously, you can contact the Crisis Hotline 1-800-273-TALK (8255) or text 741741. In case of emergency, you should call 911.

Resources

Resource	Description	Contact
If you want more information...		
American Stroke Association	Learn more about stroke and find stroke-based supports.	http://www.strokeassociation.org
National Alliance on Mental Illness	Learn more about mental health conditions, treatment options, local support services, legal issues, and support for family members.	Text NAMI to 741741 1-800-950-NAMI (6264) https://www.nami.org/
Mental Health America	Take a screening test for mental health conditions and use the database to find local mental health resources.	http://www.mentalhealthamerica.net
If you want to talk to someone...		
National Stroke Association	People with mild stroke, caregivers, and family members can speak with call-center volunteers.	1-800-STROKES (787-6537), menu option 3 http://www.stroke.org/stroke-resources/stroke-help-line
Stroke Family Warmline	Persons who have questions about stroke or who just want to talk to another stroke survivor or family member can contact the Stroke Family Warmline.	1-888-4-STROKE (7653)
If you are having a crisis...		
National Suicide Prevention Hotline	Persons who feel like hurting themselves can reach out to the National Suicide Prevention Hotline at any time of day or night.	1-800-273-TALK (8255) Text 741741 https://suicidepreventionlifeline.org/

Table 1 Mental health conditions associated with mild stroke

Mental Health Condition	Percentage of People With Mild Stroke With This Condition:	Signs or Symptoms May Include:
Depression ^{3,4}	30%-40%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Feeling of sadness ● Loss of interest in usual activities ● Difficulty paying attention ● Eating a lot more or a lot less than usual ● Sleeping a lot more or a lot less than usual ● Feeling unmotivated or “forgetful” ● Feeling hopeless ● Having thoughts of hurting oneself
Anxiety ^{5,6}	20%-50%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Worrying a lot about everyday things ● Worrying about things related to the stroke (for example, worrying about being able to do previous activities, or worrying about having another stroke) ● Unable to stop or control worrying ● Feeling tense, restless, or exhausted ● Experiencing unusual muscle aches, pains or headache
Post-traumatic stress disorder ⁷⁻⁹	5%-30%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Feeling tense or “on guard” all of the time ● Difficulty sleeping ● Nightmares ● Thinking a lot about the stroke
Fatigue ¹⁰	20%-40%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Feeling angry or irritable ● Becoming tired easily, even after doing things that used to be easy ● Difficulty doing multiple things at once
Sleep disorder ¹¹	50%-70%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Difficulty paying attention ● Difficulty falling asleep or staying asleep

Table 2 Mental health treatments for people with mild stroke

What is the Name of the Treatment?	Who Benefits From the Treatment?	What Would the Treatment Look Like for You?
Self-Care Exercise ¹²	People with all mental health conditions	Exercise promotes good mental health. You would engage in a range of physical activity such as <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fast-paced (aerobic) exercise (eg, a brisk walk or dancing) • Strength training (eg, lifting weights) • Stretching (eg, yoga) You should check with your doctor to make sure it is safe to engage in different types of physical activity. Some exercises may need to be modified due to the mild stroke.
Pacing for fatigue ¹³	People with fatigue	Pacing is a strategy developed in collaboration with a health care professional. You would learn the amount of energy you have in a typical day and then plan your day accordingly.
Socialize with friends and family and continue regular routines	People with anxiety or depression	You would try to maintain your routines, like getting out of bed and getting dressed at the same time every day. You would also work to remain engaged in your previous social activities, such as going to religious services or civics groups.
Support groups for people with mild stroke and their family members ^{14,15}	People with mental health conditions and family members	You and your family members would share your stroke recovery story to a group of peers. You would hear your peers' stories and learn what strategies they have found most helpful.
Talk Therapy Acceptance & commitment therapy ¹⁶	People with anxiety or depression	You would talk with a psychologist or counselor to recognize your reactions to life events. Then you would select actions that are consistent with your goals and values.
Behavioral activation ¹⁷	People with depression	You would talk with a psychologist or counselor to identify activities that you used to enjoy. Then you would try to re-engage and become more active.

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Table 2 (continued)

What is the Name of the Treatment?	Who Benefits From the Treatment?	What Would the Treatment Look Like for You?
Cognitive-behavioral therapy ¹⁸	People with anxiety, depression, sleep issues, or fatigue	You would talk with a psychologist or counselor to identify negative thoughts. Then you would find new positive ways to think and develop new coping strategies.
Medications Medications for stroke and side effects of medications ¹⁹	People with all mental health conditions	People with mild stroke often get medications to manage their health and reduce the risk of having another stroke. In some people, their existing medications can cause side effects (like fatigue and depression). A doctor and pharmacist would evaluate your current medications and may adjust medications to improve mental health.
Medications for mental health ²⁰	People with all mental health conditions	Doctor may prescribe a new medication specifically for the treatment of mental health issues.

Authorship

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