

# Caregivers: Supporting Your Recovery Team

Your stroke may have happened to you, but when it comes to your treatment and recovery, you'll rely on a team of healthcare professionals and caregivers every step of the way.

Just like your stroke will change your life, it will also change the lives of your caregivers and loved ones.

*"I guess that's all I thought about, was what to do about him. I knew that he would be well taken care of in the hospital, but then I was worried about, when he gets home, he's going to need somebody at home. I carry the insurance, so I knew I couldn't be out of work. I didn't have a lot of time that I could take off."*

*"You want to be supportive. You need to listen to everything that's being said, but all of a sudden you realize this person is very sick, and your life is going to change."*

A stroke can affect you both physically and emotionally. Some effects may be obvious right away, like your ability to perform daily functions, but others may take more time to become felt.

Just as these changes can be overwhelming for you, they can also be very difficult for your caregivers.

*"It's going to take a while. And no one knows how long it's going to take. Even the neurologist, the doctor has no idea how long it's going to take. And so, you have to have patience and realize that things are going to keep getting better."*

Just like the patient, stroke caregivers can experience a range of emotions, including: shock; anger; fear; loss; feeling overwhelmed; unsure of how to help.

At the same time they are dealing with their own emotions relating to the stroke, they may also be struggling with the extra workload that comes with being a caregiver.

This can mean everything from arranging transportation to therapy, making sure all the prescriptions are filled, dealing with insurance and finances, and continuing to work to bring in income.

The good news is there are resources to help caregivers. And you can also help in supporting your caregivers by making sure they are taking care of themselves.

*"You have to realize is that you can't be with this person 24 hours a day seven days a week. You need to take some time for yourself."*

The American Stroke Association and other organizations, including your local hospital and stroke centers, offer support groups.

Support groups can help provide education on stroke as well as connect caregivers with other people in the same situation.

*"Often times they are sharing their experience which would include feelings of frustration, anger. Those feelings are normal to have and what's good about the support group setting is they will find that there are other caregivers, other family members that can relate to their experience."*

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Even with support, taking on the responsibilities of being a caregiver can be challenging and emotionally difficult. Some caregivers may notice symptoms of depression.

Some of these symptoms might include: feelings of hopelessness; feeling overwhelmed; feeling tired; changes in sleep patterns; changes in eating patterns; getting angry easily; thoughts or talking of suicide.

If you are a caregiver and experience these symptoms, or if you see these symptoms in a loved one, seek out help from a qualified mental health professional.

There are also steps caregivers can take to protect their mental health, including:

Setting reasonable goals for caretaking.

Creating a support network of their own with people they can confide in.

Getting exercise.

Participating in activities they enjoy, like playing games, or going to movies.

And asking for help from others.

A stroke is something that happens not only to you, but to the people in your life as well.

Each of you will face your own challenges, and you all can support each other through the difficult times.