



How Should I Communicate as a Caregiver?

As a caregiver, you have to communicate with many people: your loved one, family, friends, co-workers, health care professionals and insurance companies. Effective communication is key to your success.

Separate your emotions from your conversations and keep on the subject for each person you talk to. Here are some simple tips to help you stay focused and get the best results.



Communication Tips

Talking to your family:

- Talk openly about your fears, worries and needs.
- Remember that everyone is feeling the pressure and insecurity of the event. Give everyone time to adjust in his or her own way.

Talking to your loved one:

- Give yourselves time to accept what has happened. Realize that your roles, such as managing finances, may have changed.
- Recognize that your loved one may not be able to do things they used to – at least for now.
- Use “I” messages rather than “you” messages. When you feel angry or frustrated, say “I feel angry,” instead of “You make me angry” to express your feeling without blaming others.
- Be firm, honest, patient and kind.

Talking to health care professionals:

You can improve the care your loved one receives by talking about your concerns, asking questions and getting the

facts. Simple communication skills can help you get what you need from your health care team — over the phone, at the hospital or during office visits.

- Clarify what you hear to be sure you understand the information or instructions when you talk to your health care team.
- Write down your questions or concerns before office visits to make sure you get all your topics covered.
- Review what you have heard at the end of a phone call or office visit. Repeat what you and your health care professional agreed upon.

How do I communicate with someone who’s had a heart event or a stroke?

A heart event or a stroke can be frightening. You both need time to adjust and freely express your emotions to one another. You’ll also need to help your loved one follow his or her treatment plan for the best possible recovery.

- Understand that your loved one has gone through a physical and emotional event.
- Be a good listener. Be patient and let them talk to you about their fears and feelings.

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How Should I Communicate as a Caregiver?

- Expect emotional ups and downs which may include crying for no reason, nightmares, or even fear of death. Your loved one will need time to adjust.
- Encourage your loved one to start making the necessary lifestyle changes to prevent further events or complications.
- Learn as much as you can about their condition and help them get back into life.

How do I communicate with a stroke survivor?

Stroke recovery can be difficult. Stroke can have a big impact on your loved one's ability to communicate, especially if he or she has aphasia.

- Set a topic before beginning a conversation.
- Say something simple. Give the person time to grasp one idea before moving on to another.
- Ask yes/no questions.
- Paraphrase to make sure you comprehend what your loved one is saying.
- Try gesturing, drawing pictures or writing down key words to get your meaning across.
- Ask for communication tips from your loved one's speech therapist.



HOW CAN I LEARN MORE?

- 1 Call 1-800-AHA-USA1 (1-800-242-8721), or visit [heart.org](https://www.heart.org) to learn more about heart disease and stroke.
- 2 Sign up for our monthly *Heart Insight* e-news for heart patients and their families at [HeartInsight.org](https://www.heartinsight.org).
- 3 Connect with others sharing similar journeys with heart disease and stroke by joining our Support Network at [heart.org/SupportNetwork](https://www.heart.org/SupportNetwork).

Do you have questions for your doctor or nurse?

Take a few minutes to write down your questions for the next time you see your health care professional.

For example:

How can I help my loved one get back to as normal a life as possible?

MY QUESTIONS:

We have many other fact sheets to help you make healthier choices to reduce your risk for heart disease, manage your condition or care for a loved one. Visit [heart.org/AnswersByHeart](https://www.heart.org/AnswersByHeart) to learn more.