



Patient & Family Guide
2016

Recovery After a Mild Stroke



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What is a mild stroke?

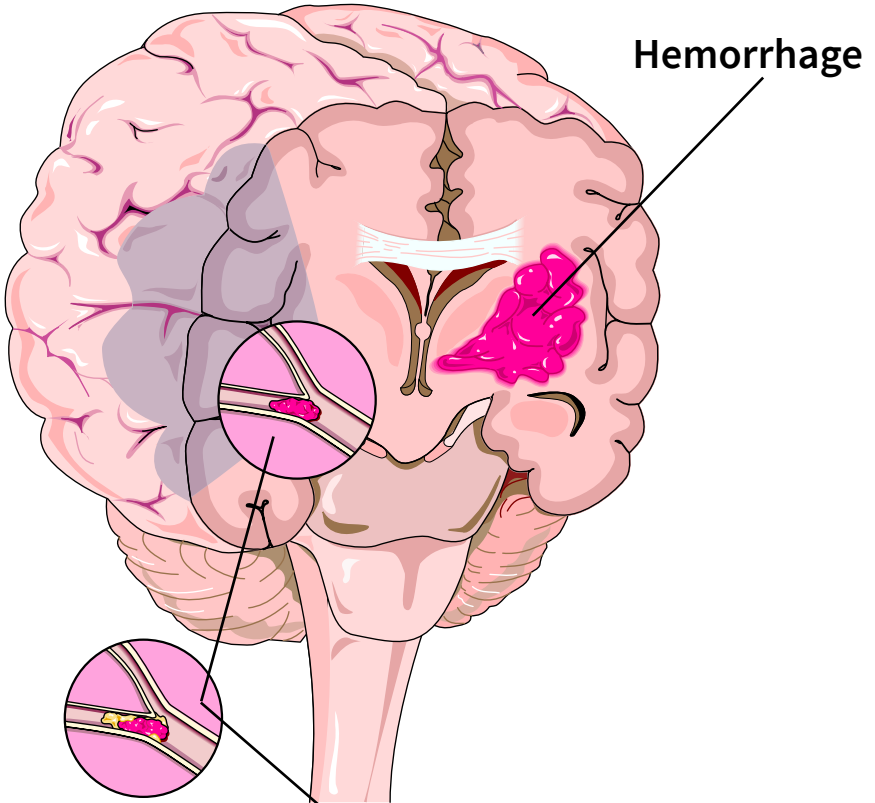
A stroke happens when the blood flow to the brain is interrupted and cells die as a result. The problems that happen after a stroke depend on the size and location of the damage to the brain.

The blood supply to the brain can be interrupted in 2 different ways:

- A blood clot forms on or in the wall of a blood vessel and stops blood from getting to part of the brain. This is called an ischemic stroke (or brain infarct). About 8 out of 10 strokes are ischemic.
- A blood vessel bursts, causing bleeding in and/or around the brain. This is called a hemorrhagic stroke (or brain hemorrhage).

Talk with your doctor or nurse about the type of stroke that you had.

Your stroke might have been described as mild because you are still able to look after yourself and take part in everyday activities. When you get home you may notice some of the symptoms described in this booklet.



Hemorrhage

**Blood clot on or in the
wall of a blood vessel**

What are some of the common things I may feel after a mild stroke?

Fatigue or low energy

You may be more tired after you have had a mild stroke. Sometimes activities that did not make you feel tired before your stroke will now tire you out.

Common signs of fatigue:

- › Feelings of low energy or sleepiness
- › Trouble concentrating
- › Making mistakes
- › Irritability (grumpiness) and/or mood swings
- › Headaches

Things that may help:

- Take short rests or naps when needed.
- Try to get a good night's sleep.
- Try to take breaks between activities that make you tired.
- Slowly build up your activity to a level that works for you.

If symptoms get worse, it may be a sign that you are pushing yourself too hard.

Talk to your healthcare provider about meeting with an Occupational Therapist if your fatigue gets in the way of what you need to do each day.

Depression or low mood

You may feel sad or worried after a stroke. The difference between sadness and depression is that with depression these feelings stay with you and get in the way of your ability to manage your everyday activities.

Depression is very common after a stroke. As many as 1 out of 4 people have depression after a stroke. It is important to know the signs of depression and to get help early because it can affect your overall well-being and recovery.

Common signs of depression:

- › Feeling sad
- › Feeling hopeless or helpless
- › Not feeling hungry or interested in eating
- › Not feeling interested in doing things that you usually like to do
- › Trouble sleeping
- › Lack of energy
- › Trouble concentrating
- › Irritability

Things that may help:

- Meeting with a psychologist or support counsellor.
- Medicines that will help your mood.
- Physical activities like gardening or walking.

Changes in behaviour and personality

You may also notice changes in your behaviour and personality. Common signs of these changes include:

- › Doing things without thinking them through
- › Becoming irritable or frustrated
- › Getting stuck on one thing and having a hard time seeing someone else's point of view
- › Getting upset in situations that would not have bothered you before

You may notice these changes more often when you are tired.

Things that may help:

- Talk with family and friends about these changes. Talk about what you can do together to make things easier.
- Be matter of fact. Explain to others that these changes are part of the stroke.
- Have a daily routine.
- If you feel edgy or upset, take a break and relax.
- Sometimes a few minutes are enough to get control of your emotions.

Changes in thinking skills

After a mild stroke, you may notice:

- › You are easily distracted and find that you have a hard time paying attention.
- › You have trouble focusing on what someone is saying in a busy place like a restaurant.
- › You have trouble sticking with one task and find yourself jumping from one thing to another.
- › You have trouble with your memory, mainly with new information. You might find that you forget important details like names, dates, appointments, taking your medicine, and turning off the stove.
- › You may decide things without thinking through all the details.
- › You may be less organized and it may take longer to get things done.

Things that may help:

- Take away the distractions around you (like radio or TV).
- Break things down into small steps.
- Have a daily routine.
- Allow extra time for problem solving.
- Write things down. Use a day planner or organizer.

Trouble speaking

After a mild stroke, you may have trouble speaking. There are 2 reasons this happens:

1. Weakness of the muscles in the mouth or throat. This is called dysarthria. Speech will sound slurred.
2. Damage to the area of the brain in charge of language. This is called aphasia. It may be hard to understand what others are saying or it may be hard to find the words you want to say even though you KNOW what you want to say. Writing or spelling can be hard for a person with aphasia.

Things that may help:

- Slow down your speech by saying one word at a time.
- When the word is not coming to you, think of another word that is close to what you want to say.
- Gesture or try to show what you want.
- Do not talk about important things when you are tired.
- Talk in quiet places.

If troubles with your speech or language don't get better over time, talk to your healthcare provider about meeting with a Speech Language Pathologist.

Changes in your sight

Changes in your sight and how you see things after a stroke can make it hard to do many of your daily activities.

Common signs of changes in your vision:

- › Loss of part of your vision (visual field)
- › Double vision
- › Blurry vision

Seeing an eye doctor will help you figure out what kind of visual problem you have. They can tell you if anything can be done to help.

Problems with vision may get better over time. Vision problems may seem worse when you are tired.

Trouble walking

After a stroke you may have trouble walking.

- › You may feel off-balance and clumsy.
- › Your leg may feel heavy.
- › You may find that you catch your toes on the floor.

These problems could be because of changes in leg strength, balance, coordination, and/or the ability to feel things. Often these things get better over time, but if they don't go away, talk to your healthcare provider or a physiotherapist.

Trouble using your arm and hand

After a mild stroke you may have trouble using your arm or hand.

You may:

- › Feel clumsy.
- › Drop things without knowing.
- › Take longer to do activities such as writing or cutting food.
- › Feel weak. Doing things like carrying a full laundry basket or taking out the garbage may be harder.
- › Find that your arm and hand tire quickly.
- › Rely on your stronger arm and hand for many tasks.

Things that may help:

- Use your weak arm and hand as much as you can in safe activities.
- If troubles with your arm and hand stop you from doing the things that are important to you each day, talk to your healthcare provider about meeting with an Occupational Therapist.

Changes in sexuality or sexual function

After a stroke you may notice troubles with sexual function.

Common reasons for changes in sexual function:

- › Fear that sex may cause another stroke – there is no proof that this can happen
- › Not feeling good about yourself
- › Depression, fatigue, or pain
- › More or less interest in sexual activity
- › Trouble with positioning due to weakness
- › Less vaginal lubrication
- › Impotence (when a man can't get or keep an erection) – this may also be linked to medicine you are taking

Although you may find it hard to talk about this topic, there may be things that will help. Talk to your healthcare provider about your questions and options.

Frequently asked questions:

How long will the symptoms last?

Progress is different for each person recovering from a stroke.

Most people do get better over time. How fast and how much you recover depends on the symptom, the area of the brain affected, and how much damage there is.

When can I drive again?

Your ability to drive safely may have been changed by your stroke. People who have had a stroke should not drive for at least 1 month. Depending on your recovery, it may be more than 1 month before you can safely return to driving. Be sure to talk about this with your team in the hospital or your healthcare provider. You may be referred for a formal driving assessment by an Occupational Therapist.

What is my chance of having another stroke?

Each stroke is one of a kind. Your chance of having another stroke depends on many factors. Talk about this with your healthcare provider.

What can I do to prevent another stroke?

- Know what your blood pressure is and keep it under control.
- Stop smoking.
- Take your medicine as agreed.
- Manage your diabetes.
- Control your cholesterol.
- Eat a healthy, low-fat, low-salt diet.
- Be physically active.
- Keep a healthy weight.
- Limit alcohol use.

Internet resources

Heart and Stroke Foundation

www.strokebestpractices.ca

Find health information about stroke including diagnosis, treatment, prevention, and other resources. Look for ‘Your Stroke Journey’ and ‘Taking Charge of Your Stroke Recovery’.

Canadian Partnership for Stroke Recovery

www.canadianstroke.ca

Find information about stroke recovery and rehabilitation.

**If you have any questions, please ask.
We are here to help you.**

Looking for more health information?

This pamphlet and all our active patient pamphlets are searchable here:

<http://bit.ly/NSHApamphlets>

Contact your local public library for books, videos, magazines, and other resources.

For more information go to <http://library.novascotia.ca>

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Nova Scotia Health Authority

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If you have any questions, please ask your healthcare provider.

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The information in this pamphlet is to be updated every 3 years or as needed.