

# Depression and anxiety after stroke

## What you need to know

- › **Depression and anxiety are common after a stroke.**
- › **You may have depression if you feel sad or down for more than two weeks. You may lose interest in things you normally enjoy, lack energy, have difficulty sleeping, or sleep more than usual.**
- › **You may have anxiety if anxious feelings do not go away once a stressful situation is over or if you feel anxious for no particular reason.**
- › **Depression and anxiety are highly treatable and recovery is common.**

## About depression and anxiety

After a stroke, it is normal to feel sad or worried. But if you feel sad, down or miserable for more than two weeks, you may have depression. You may lose interest or pleasure in things you normally enjoy. You may lack energy, have difficulty sleeping, or sleep more than usual. You may find it difficult to concentrate, to solve problems and to keep appointments.

Feeling anxious is normal when we feel under pressure. The feelings usually go away when the stressful situation is over. If anxious feelings do not go away, or if you are anxious for no particular reason, you may have anxiety.

## The link between depression, anxiety and stroke

Having a stroke is a life-changing event. It can change how you feel about yourself and make you worry about the future. Changes to responsibilities, relationships, work and finances can cause stress and sadness. The impact of stroke on the brain can also cause personality, mood and emotional changes. All this means there is a strong link between stroke, depression and anxiety.

One in three people experience depression at some point during the five years after their stroke. Depression is most common in the first year after a stroke, however it can happen at any time. Anxiety may also occur, either by itself or together with depression.

Partners, carers and family members of stroke survivors can experience depression and anxiety as well.

## Getting help for depression and anxiety

Depression and anxiety can make it difficult to manage from day to day, and to participate in your rehabilitation. Depression and anxiety can affect how you feel about yourself, and can have an impact on your relationships.

While depression and anxiety are common, they are also highly treatable. Recovery is possible and there are many things that can

help. The sooner you get help, the sooner you will move towards recovery.

If you think depression or anxiety may be an issue for you, speak to your doctor. It is important to have a medical diagnosis and a treatment plan that takes into account your personal situation, needs and preferences. Some medications can make you lethargic which can feel like the symptoms of depression, so a medication review can be helpful as a part of this process.

## Medication

Anti-depressants are very useful in the treatment of moderate to severe depression. Your doctor may prescribe antidepressant medication along with psychological treatments. Anti-depressants are sometimes prescribed when other treatments have not been successful. They are also used when psychological treatments are not possible. Research shows psychological therapies are the most effective treatment option for people with anxiety. However for severe anxiety, medication may be helpful.

## Psychological treatments

If you have mild or moderate depression, psychological treatment and lifestyle changes may work for you.

**Cognitive behaviour therapy (CBT).** Helps you identify and change unhelpful thought patterns, creating a more positive and problem-solving approach. It is one of the most effective treatments for depression.



The Stroke Foundation partners with the community to prevent, treat and beat stroke. We do this through raising awareness, facilitating research and supporting stroke survivors.

Contact us

 **StrokeLine 1800 STROKE (1800 787 653)**

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**Behaviour therapy.** Behaviour therapy focuses on doing activities that are rewarding, pleasant or satisfying. It aims to get you involved in life again.

**Interpersonal therapy.** Helps you recognise patterns in your relationships that make you more vulnerable to depression. You focus on improving relationships, coping with sadness and grief, and finding new ways to get along with others.

**Mindfulness-based cognitive therapy.** Group therapy that involves meditation. Mindfulness meditation teaches you to focus on the present moment without trying to change it. It can help to stop your mind wandering off into thoughts about the future or the past. It helps you notice feelings of sadness and negativity early on before they become fixed.

## Lifestyle

Having a healthy lifestyle can help you feel good in body and mind. Eat well and limit alcohol. Exercising regularly is especially helpful.

Do activities you enjoy and spend time with people whose company you enjoy. Talk to a trusted family member or friend about your feelings.

## More help

The health professionals at **StrokeLine** provide information, advice, support and referral. StrokeLine's practical and confidential advice will help you manage your health better and live well.

Call **1800 STROKE (1800 787 653)**

Email [strokeline@strokefoundation.org.au](mailto:strokeline@strokefoundation.org.au)

Join Australia's online stroke community with videos, fact sheets, resources and support for stroke survivors, their family and friends. [enableme.org.au](http://enableme.org.au)

*beyondblue* provides information and support about depression and anxiety. 1300 22 4636 [www.beyondblue.org.au](http://www.beyondblue.org.au)