Coping with recovery after a stroke

Approximately 50,000 Canadians suffer strokes each year, but early assessment and treatment are increasing recovery odds. Doctors can now determine what part of the brain has been affected by a stroke, allowing for cal complications and better treatment methods.



If someone close to you has suffered a stroke, you need to be prepared —both physically and mentally—to help in the recovery process. Given that a stroke can cause physical and mental impairments, the road to recovery can be rocky.

Understanding strokes

A stroke occurs when the flow of blood carrying oxygen and nutrients to parts of the brain is cut off. This can happen if blood vessels clog or a clot bursts, causing damage in the area of the blockage. Warning signs include:

- Weakness
- Trouble speaking
- Vision problems
- Headache
- Dizziness

Anyone suffering any of these symptoms should see a doctor immediately for the best chance of a successful recovery.

Advice for you as the caregiver

If someone in your life has suffered a stroke, you may be required to assist in their care as they recover. If you are in this caregiving situation, below are some suggestions on how to best offer your support:

- Avoid “talking down” to stroke survivors. Continue to treat them as intelligent adults.
- Learning to do as much as possible independently is an important part of the recovery process. Don't be too quick to do things for your loved one.
- Always ask if your help is wanted or needed before you jump in.
- When you do help, try to do so unobtrusively.
- Allow time for grieving for what has been lost.
- Some individuals make rapid progress during the first two weeks following their stroke. After this period, expect smaller, incremental improvements.

The caregiving team

While caring for your loved one following a stroke, don’t assume that you have to go it alone. Professionals of different specialties are available to assist you:

- A social worker or psychologist will be available to help with emotional issues.
- A neurophysiologist can help in assessing speech, concentration, memory, problem solving and the ability to pay attention.
- An occupational therapist can help your loved one find new ways of handling everyday tasks.

- A physiotherapist can help to recover some movement and maintain muscle tone in affected limbs.
- A discharge planner can help obtain extra help in the home and arrange extra services.

Above all, the key to a successful recovery from a stroke is patience. Do not expect your loved one to be “good as new” overnight. Be sure to offer your support and care throughout the recovery process. And above all, don’t hesitate to contact a medical doctor or other trained professional if you have additional concerns throughout your loved one’s recovery.