

Depression

A certain amount of depression is a normal part of the grieving process that usually follows stroke (see page 94), but depression can be severe enough to affect functioning, and can slow down the rehabilitation of the person who has the stroke or make a caregiver unable to adequately look after the person.

Warning signs

- Feeling sad, hopeless, helpless, worthless
- Thinking of suicide
- Negative self-image
- Loss of appetite or markedly increased appetite
- Loss of sexual drive
- Weight loss
- Negative thoughts about the future
- Poor concentration
- Low energy
- Waking very early in the morning
- Irritability
- Loss of interest in others
- Indecision.

There is a fine line between the stress, tiredness and feeling 'down' to be expected after a stroke, and more serious depression, so it is important to fully discuss depressed feelings with the doctor. Expert help and advice can make an amazing difference.

What helps

- Counselling at an early stage can be helpful.
- Advice from a psychiatrist can be invaluable in planning treatment.

The person with depression can also do a great deal for themselves, for example by:

- recognising the need to accept help
- dealing with stress ([see page 113](#))
- understanding that depression is not a 'weakness', but a health disorder
- recognising that depression is part of the grieving process ([see page 97](#)) and that being depressed is a stage in the recognition of how things have changed
- talking about their feelings and getting more understanding of their psychological state
- changing the depressed behaviour, eg, making an effort to get going when they don't feel like it, filling an hour with a demanding task or entertaining activity that leaves no room for depressed thoughts. This is a way of controlling the depression instead of letting it take charge. Once the initial effort is made, the hardest part is over.

Joining a social rehabilitation group, such as a stroke club, or rejoining old activities and interests, eg, attending concerts or sports events, bowling club, senior citizens' club, RSA, etc. will help to alleviate depression, but caregivers may need to take the initiative and take the person along at first in the face of protests.