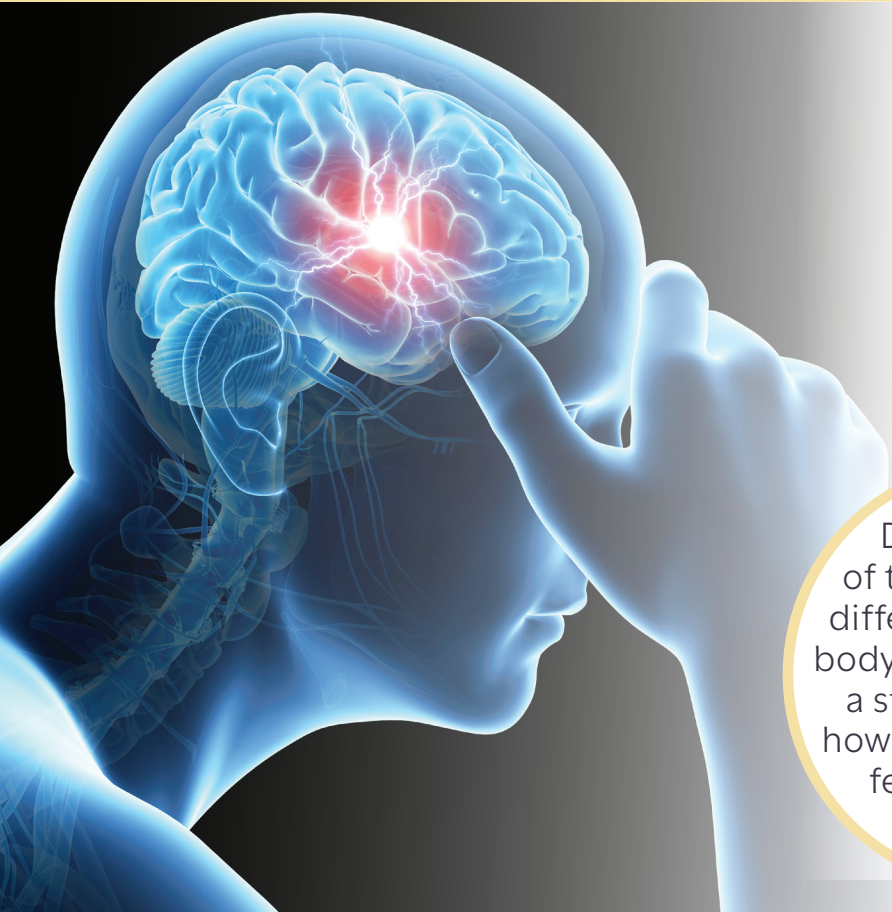


EMOTIONAL AND BEHAVIOURAL CHANGES AFTER STROKE

This fact sheet is about:

- the emotional and behavioural changes after stroke
- how left-brain and right-brain injury differ
- strategies to help deal with psychological changes



Different parts of the brain control different parts of the body. Brain injury from a stroke may affect how a survivor moves, feels, thinks and behaves.

LEFT BRAIN INJURY

Those with left brain injury and a paralysed right side (called right hemiplegia) are more likely to have problems with speech and language. They also tend to be cautious, hesitant, anxious and disorganised when faced with an unfamiliar problem. People with right hemiplegia need frequent assurance that they are doing okay, with lots of immediate positive feedback. Breaking down tasks into steps with lots of practice will often aid learning.

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RIGHT BRAIN INJURY

Those with right brain injury and a paralysed left side (called left hemiplegia) may have problems with spatial-perceptual tasks such as judging distance, size, position, rate of movement, form, and how parts relate to a whole. People with severe spatial-perceptual deficits may have more trouble with self-care. They may not be able to read a paper – not because they cannot read, but because they lose their place on the page. They tend to have a behavioural style that is too quick and impulsive, and behave in a way that makes it easy to overestimate their abilities. They are often unaware of their deficits and may think themselves capable of tasks they are not (e.g. driving).

SOME COMMON CHANGES IN PEOPLE AFTER A STROKE:

Emotional lability. This is also known as 'reflex crying' or 'labile mood' and is characterised by rapid mood changes that include crying or laughing. These changes may not fit a person's mood or may last longer than seems appropriate. However, this does settle once people begin to recover from their stroke and gain increased emotional control.

Depression. This is very common in people who have had a stroke and is characterised by feelings of sadness, hopelessness or helplessness. They may suffer irritability and changes in eating, sleeping and thinking. Grieving following a stroke can cause similar symptoms, but depression symptoms are more pervasive and persistent (six weeks or more). Depression needs to be treated as soon as possible by your doctor.

Short retention span. People with an affected retention span might only remember part of a complicated message. For example, in a series of instructions, they may remember only two or three steps and may struggle with learning something new. Some stroke survivors may also have problems transferring learning from one setting to another. For example, they may know how to get in and out of bed in hospital themselves, but be unable to perform the same task at home. Caregivers can help by: establishing a fixed routine, keeping messages short, presenting new information one-step at a time and teaching tasks in settings that resemble the environment where the task will be done.

STRATEGIES TO HELP DEAL WITH THESE PSYCHOLOGICAL CHANGES

For the stroke survivor and their family/whānau:



1. Emotional and behavioural changes are quite common after a stroke and usually improve with time. Specific things may trigger certain behaviour and you may have to learn how to avoid these, or learn what to say or do to minimise the problem. Above all, try not to overreact.



2. Accept help offered by others. Expert help from a psychologist can be very helpful in understanding and minimising the problem.



3. Seek advice about how to solve daily living problems.



4. Everybody needs time out in a normal relationship. Make sure you arrange this and have time for yourself.



5. Sharing your feelings is often helpful. Stroke groups can provide a local network. Visit the Stroke Aotearoa New Zealand website for information on stroke groups in your area.

You can also call Stroke Aotearoa New Zealand on **0800 78 76 53** for information about stroke groups or other local support networks.

About Stroke Aotearoa New Zealand

Stroke Aotearoa New Zealand is the national charity dedicated to stroke prevention and improving outcomes for stroke survivors and their whānau. The generosity of individuals allows us to provide every aspect of our life-changing services.

If you want to find out more about donating or fundraising to help protect the lives of people living in your community, please call **0800 45 99 54** or email fundraising@stroke.org.nz.