

LOOKING AFTER YOURSELF

Support for carers of stroke survivors



As a carer, your support makes a vital difference in recovery

Caring for someone who has had a stroke is a new experience for almost every caregiver. It's a journey filled with learning and challenges, but it can also be deeply rewarding. As a carer, your support makes a vital difference in recovery. While the focus is often on the stroke survivor, your wellbeing is just as important.

This guide provides practical advice to help you navigate your role, look after yourself, and find the support you need.

COMMON CHALLENGES FOR CARERS

Caring for someone who has had a stroke will bring changes and challenges to daily life. Recognising these challenges is the first step to managing them. Support is available to help you cope and thrive in your role.

Becoming a carer is a journey that can be deeply rewarding and filled with learning.

Some common experiences include:

- Adapting to new relationship dynamics and responsibilities
- Managing complex health needs and rehabilitation
- Grieving changes in your loved one's physical, emotional, or cognitive abilities
- Feeling a loss of personal time, independence, or future plans
- Balancing your own wellbeing while providing care

COMMON CHALLENGES FOR CARERS CONTINUED

Your Carer Journey

Caring for someone after a stroke is a journey that changes over time. As the needs of your loved one shift, so do yours. Looking after yourself is just as important as looking after them. Here are some practical ways to navigate different stages with confidence.

Hospital-based care

If your loved one is in hospital receiving rehabilitation you may need to understand hospital processes, work with healthcare professionals, and plan for their return home. This can be a time of uncertainty, but you don't have to face it alone. Here's what can help:

- Get informed – Ask questions and find out what treatments and rehabilitation steps are coming up so you know what to expect
- Build a support network – Connect with family, friends, and professionals who can offer emotional and practical help
- Be kind to yourself – Focus on what you can do rather than worrying about things beyond your control

Looking after yourself is just as important as looking after them



“You have to be a strong advocate and I don't think you can be a strong advocate without doing some research or asking people to explain what is happening.”

- Research and ask for explanations so you can confidently support and advocate for your loved one's recovery.

Returning Home

Bringing a stroke survivor home is a big step. As the main carer, your role may change, and it's important to look after both your loved one and yourself.

- Stay connected – Spend time with family and friends to maintain a sense of normality and support.
- Recognise burn-out signs – Watch for tiredness, irritability, or stress, and take action early.
- Communicate openly – Talk with your loved one about ways to support both of your wellbeing needs.
- Use available services – Look into respite care and community resources. A Community Stroke Navigator, GP, or nurse can guide you.
- Live well – Eating well, staying active, and getting enough sleep will help you stay strong and healthy.
- Ask for help – You are not alone. Connect with others in similar situations, or reach out to a Community Stroke Navigator, Health Improvement Practitioner or Health Coach.
- Be proud of yourself – You are doing an incredible job and developing valuable skills along the way.

RESIDENTIAL CARE

Your loved one may need to move into residential care, either for a break (respite) or permanently. Adjusting to residential care is a journey in itself, but with support and preparation, it can bring stability and new opportunities for both you and your loved one.

Helpful steps:

- Plan ahead – Look into options before it becomes urgent.
- Get good advice – A Community Stroke Navigator, GP, or nurse can help you understand residential care options and financial support.
- Stay involved – Even if you're no longer the primary carer, your emotional support and advocacy remain essential.

Residential care can bring stability and new opportunities for you and your loved one



- ➔ “It was strange having to get to know this new person who was still the old person I loved.”

- See the positives – This change may allow you more personal time and space to reconnect with other aspects of life.
- Stay connected – Keep in touch with friends and whānau who can offer support.

BUILDING RESILIENCE FOR WELLBEING

Caring for someone after a stroke comes with many challenges, but with the right support and mindset, you can navigate these challenges and find balance in both caregiving and your personal life.

Here are some key strategies to help you cope and thrive.

Gain Knowledge to Make Informed Decisions

- Learn as much as you can about stroke, recovery, and available resources. Understanding stroke can give you a sense of control and help you feel more confident in problem-solving.
- Over time, you will develop skills and strengths that suit your situation—you become your own expert.

Understanding stroke can help you feel more confident



“I spoke with Health Professionals so I was aware of what was going to happen in the future – it meant that I was able to prepare not only our home but our new way of life.”



- ➔ “Every day you learn something. Each month you realise you’re slightly better off than the month before.”

Foster Positive Thinking to Support Emotional Wellbeing

- Accepting the new reality can reduce stress and help you focus on positive actions. This includes recognising both challenges and opportunities.
- Practice gratitude by focusing on what brings you joy. Keeping a gratitude journal, cherishing relationships, and enjoying nature can bring a sense of calm and control.

Build Strong Support Networks

- Be honest about your limits and know when to ask for help. Recognising your strengths while seeking support is a sign of resilience.
- Strengthen your support network with whānau, friends, and professionals. Let people

know how they can help—you don’t have to do everything alone.

- Use available services like respite care, day programmes, and companion support. Taking time for yourself benefits both you and your loved one.
- Community Stroke Navigators can connect you with local support groups and resources relevant to your needs.

Maintain Healthy Relationships

- Keep open and honest communication with the person you are caring for. Understanding each other’s needs supports overall wellbeing.
- Be flexible and review your needs over time. The stroke survivor’s dependence on you may change, and they may not always understand the demands of caregiving.
- Remember, caring for yourself is just as important as caring for your loved one. Looking after your own wellbeing allows you to provide the best support possible.

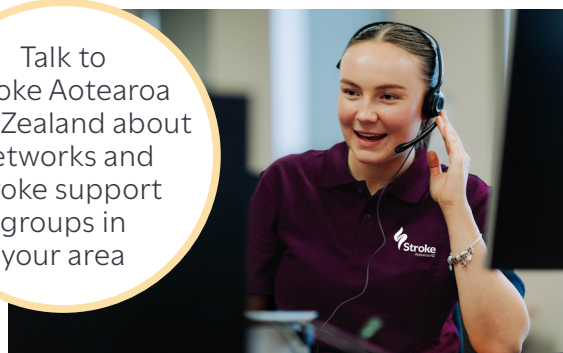
WHERE TO FIND HELP AND INFORMATION

Get Support from Stroke Aotearoa New Zealand

The Stroke Aotearoa Navigator service is here to support carers with advice, information, and skills. Our Community Stroke Navigators ensure stroke survivors and their whānau receive the right services and connect you with local support networks and stroke groups.

- Call us: **0800 78 76 53**
- Visit our website: **stroke.org.nz** for useful resources.

Talk to Stroke Aotearoa New Zealand about networks and stroke support groups in your area



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**.

IF YOU ARE IN A CRISIS SITUATION, CALL 111

Other helpful links

Carers New Zealand

Carers.net.nz

Ministry of Health

health.govt.nz | Search for ‘carer support’

Mental Health Foundation

mentalhealth.org.nz | Search for ‘wellbeing’