

DEPRESSION & ANXIETY AFTER STROKE

Recognising the signs and how to get help



Depression or anxiety can be 'hidden' in the effects of stroke and difficult to recognise

WHAT IS DEPRESSION AND ANXIETY?

Depression and anxiety each affect around a third of people in the first year following their stroke. It is also common to experience both depression and anxiety at the same time.

These experiences can be upsetting and overwhelming, however, there are proven ways to manage them and to start to feel better.

Depression

When a person feels a persistent feeling of sadness or loss of interest, lacking in energy and unmotivated to do things they would normally enjoy, this is what we call depression.

Anxiety

When a person often feels anxious and on edge, worries constantly or has a sense of panic, this is what we call anxiety.

• • ➔ "I realised one day, why am I so sad? I'd never had depression or anxiety before my stroke. I didn't even know I had it, until someone said the words and I thought that's what it is, bingo."



WHY IS IT COMMON TO EXPERIENCE DEPRESSION AND ANXIETY AFTER STROKE?

Depression and anxiety can happen after stroke because of physical damage or emotional changes to the brain, or it can be a combination of both.

Physical Changes

A stroke causes physical damage to the brain. When cells in the brain are damaged, a person may have difficulty controlling emotions or experience personality changes, which could lead to depression and anxiety. Some people are affected by chronic pain following a stroke and this can also lead to depression and anxiety.

Emotional changes

A stroke is a frightening experience. It happens suddenly, causes uncertainties, shakes our confidence, and it can take time to come to terms with what has happened. Many people feel scared, frustrated or angry about what has happened to them, the impact of their disabilities and the changes they are experiencing. They may feel grief and like they have lost their independence or that they are not in control of their situation. People can also feel anxious about whether they will have another stroke.



“I had lost some vision, so I’d feel really confident and bubbly, like my normal self, then I’d walk into a wall and that would just knock me for six and I’d get really upset.”

Many people feel scared, frustrated or angry about what has happened to them



RECOGNISING THE SIGNS OF DEPRESSION AND ANXIETY AFTER STROKE

Depression or anxiety can be 'hidden' in the effects of stroke and difficult to recognise. It may help to look out for some key signs to decide whether you, or someone close to you, may be experiencing depression or anxiety.



PHYSICAL (TINANA)

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|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Feeling tired and lacking energy• Eating too much or too little• Racing heart, chest pains, sweating and breathlessness (<i>If you have new symptoms of chest pain, you should seek medical help right now</i>) | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Sleeping too much or too little• Trouble relaxing• Moving or speaking more slowly or more quickly than usual |
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MENTAL (HINENGARO)

- | | |
|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Losing interest in things you used to enjoy• Worrying that awful things will happen• Difficulty thinking and concentrating• Feeling whakamā, shame or a failure | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Feeling angry• Feeling like ending your life• Feeling sad and unmotivated• Feeling nervous or anxious a lot |
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SOCIAL (WHĀNAU)

- | | |
|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Feeling like other people don't understand• Feeling empty and lonely• Getting irritated or hōhā with others | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Losing interest in whānau and friends and avoiding contact with them• Wanting to be left alone |
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SPIRITUAL (WAIKUA)

- | | |
|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Feeling there is no purpose to life• Having bad dreams | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Feeling numb and disconnected from your tīpuna, your ancestry |
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Credit: Health Promotion Agency. Based on the Te Whare Tapa Whā model by Mason Durie.

→ If you need more support and advice, **Lifeline 0800 543 354** provides free advice 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

GETTING HELP AND WAYS TO TREAT DEPRESSION AND ANXIETY

Speak to someone you trust – a friend, whānau member, elder, or a Stroke Aotearoa Community Stroke Navigator (0800 78 76 53). They can listen and be there for you, as well as provide advice and practical support.

Visit your family doctor, primary care nurse, Health Improvement Practitioner or Health Coach. They can talk to you about what you are going through and how to manage it – with talking therapy (counselling) or medication – or a combination of both.

If stroke has caused communication and understanding difficulties, it may be helpful to use the services of a speech and language therapist before talking with a counsellor or psychologist.

Talking therapies

Talking therapies involve discussing the challenges you are experiencing in your life with a specially trained mental health professional – usually a counsellor or psychologist. They can provide strategies and support clients to find solutions to overcome these challenges. Contact Depression Helpline to speak to a trained counsellor (0800 111 757).

Medication

Antidepressant medication is the most common medical treatment for depression and anxiety. It is usually most effective in combination with talking therapy.

Antidepressant medications usually take a few weeks to work. Some people may experience side effects. It is important to consult your doctor or a health professional before you stop taking prescribed medication as you may experience withdrawal symptoms.



Other medications and treatments

Some people find complementary and alternative medicines and treatments helpful for depression and anxiety. Examples are acupuncture or rongoā (traditional Māori healing). Talk to your doctor or primary healthcare nurse first if you want to try these medicines or treatment.

“I decided I’d go back into therapy and really talk about this more in depth, because the sooner you attend to it, the better results you will get”



EXERCISE AND PHYSICAL WELLBEING

Looking after your physical wellbeing is another way you can help manage your depression and anxiety. Go for a walk and enjoy the fresh air in a park or at the beach, go for a swim or do some gardening. Regular exercise can have a profoundly positive impact on mental health.

If you often feel tired, think about the time of day when you usually feel most alert and do your exercise then. It is also important to get enough sleep and enjoy a healthy diet.

Relaxation techniques can be helpful, especially if you are experiencing anxiety. Try breathing exercises and mindfulness to help calm your mind and body.

Do things you enjoy

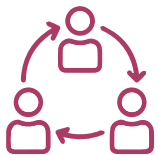
Think about the things you really enjoy doing and do those things! Maybe there is an old hobby you could take up again or start something new.

In some regions, music therapy and art therapy programmes are available. Find out about the therapies and activities in your area by calling a Stroke Aotearoa New Zealand Community Stroke Navigator **(0800 78 76 53)**.



• • • ➔ “I have a system, a routine to do things. I know I’m going to get up, going to make lunches, I’ll get dressed for work, drive to work and I’m going to function. All those little things are big things for me.”

TIPS FOR ONGOING WELLBEING



Stay connected with whānau and friends



Eat healthy meals



Remember that you are not alone – join support groups and talk to others who may be going through similar experiences



Limit alcohol



Stay as active as you can be – exercise at the time of day when you feel most alert



Find the things you love to do – and do those things



Get enough sleep



Talk to a Community Stroke Navigator – they can help with support, practical advice and information

WHERE TO FIND HELP AND INFORMATION

There are many things you can try to help manage your depression and anxiety. Find the things that work for you and keep at them. Things will get better.

Online

Visit the Stroke Aotearoa website for more information, resources, advice and self-help tips for dealing with depression and anxiety.

stroke.org.nz/resource-hub/

The Mental Health Foundation also have a wide range of helpful tools: mentalhealth.org.nz

Social contact

It is important for your wellbeing to stay connected with other people and know that you are not alone. Spend time with your whānau. Meet up with a friend for coffee and a chat.

Call Stroke Aotearoa New Zealand and talk to a Community Stroke Navigator about networks and stroke support groups in your area (0800 78 76 53).

If you are in a crisis situation, call 111

Depression Helpline

0800 111 757 or text 4202

Anxiety Helpline

0800 269 4389

Healthline

0800 611 116

Lifeline

0800 543 354 or text 4357

Samaritans

0800 726 666 or text 234

Youthline

0800 376 633

National Telehealth service

Free call or text 1737 or visit 1737.org.nz



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.