

Independence

Loss of independence and the resulting feeling of helplessness is one of the most devastating effects of stroke. It makes some people angry, and others retreat into resignation.

Learning by doing


From the beginning of rehabilitation, hospital staff will be working to assist the person to regain independence. To the family/whanau this may be misunderstood if they think the person is ill and should be looked after more. The person may feel resentful at being 'left' to cope with a tricky situation. But encouraging the person to do as much as possible helps them in the long term and speeds recovery and the regaining of self-esteem.




What helps

The family have to learn to stand back.

- Let the person try things they want or feel able to do
- The person may need to attempt things they previously did in order to find out their present limits, work out alternative strategies and build confidence
- Encourage the person to be assertive so they feel comfortable asking for or refusing help
- Resist the inclination to help more than necessary, even when a simple task is becoming chaotic and everybody is getting frustrated
- Allow the person plenty of time to complete a task – don't take over before it is finished because time is short
- Be mindful of unhealthy dependence, a tendency to 'give up' – this is hard to deal with because the person may appear unable to do more and caregivers may have to put the person in a situation where they need to manage
- Try to take a consistent approach to encouraging independence.



One of my biggest hassles was people who wanted to help me all the time.



One minute she'd expect me to do everything, the next minute she'd be doing everything for me.

What is independence?

Each person who has had a stroke will have to think long and hard about their personal goal of independence. Their definition of independence will likely change over time; at the beginning it may mean being able to get to the toilet and dress and eat without assistance. As competence with daily activities is achieved, taking a place in the wider world becomes a condition of independence. The goal expands, with aspirations always a step ahead of accomplishments.

A stage may be reached where recovery from the stroke seems to have come to a plateau, but hasn't quite reached the hoped-for independence. It may take a little more time before the person comes to realise that independence includes an inner attitude, and that the qualities acquired from having to deal with limitations can be a source of strength for themselves, their family/whanau and others.

*Most people with a stroke
fiercely crave independence,
because we've had a real
taste of what it means to be
dependent.*

The 'inner person' can continue to grow, regardless of what the body is doing.

