

# Let's Talk About Emotional Changes After Stroke

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## How can stroke change my life?

Immediately after a stroke, a survivor may respond one way, yet weeks later respond entirely differently. Some survivors may react with understandable sadness; others may be amazingly cheerful. These emotional reactions may occur because of biological causes due to stroke or because of the effects of a stroke (psychological causes). These changes may vary with time and can interfere with rehabilitation.



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## What emotional changes are biological?

Emotions may be difficult to control, especially soon after a stroke. There are two common emotional responses caused by biological changes.

Emotional lability, also called “reflex crying” or “labile mood,” can cause:

- Rapid mood changes — a person may “spill over into tears” and then quickly stop crying or may start laughing.
- Crying or laughing that doesn't match a person's mood.

- Crying or laughing that lasts longer than seems appropriate.

Post-stroke depression is characterized by:

- Feelings of sadness
- Hopelessness or helplessness
- Irritability
- Changes in eating, sleeping and thinking

Treatment for post-stroke depression may be necessary. Don't hesitate to take antidepressant medications prescribed by your doctor.

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## What emotional reactions are psychological?

Post-stroke psychological emotions are “natural.” They're just part of adjusting to the changes brought by a stroke. Often talking about the effects of the stroke and acknowledging these feelings helps stroke survivors deal with these emotions. Some common psychological reactions to stroke are:

- frustration
- anxiety
- anger
- apathy or not caring what happens
- lack of motivation
- depression or sadness

## How can I cope with my changing emotions?

- Tell yourself that your feelings aren't "good" or "bad." Let yourself cope without feeling guilty about your emotions.
- Find people who understand what you're feeling. Ask about a support group.
- Get enough exercise and seek out enjoyable activities.
- Give yourself credit for the progress you've made. Celebrate the large and small gains.
- Learn to "talk" to yourself in a positive way. Allow yourself to make mistakes.
- Ask your doctor for help. Ask for a referral to a mental health specialist for psychological counseling or antidepressant medication if needed for depression.






## How can I learn more?

- Talk to your doctor, nurse or other healthcare professionals. Ask about other stroke topics. This is one of many *Let's Talk About Stroke* fact sheets available.
- For more information on stroke, or to receive additional fact sheets, call the American Stroke Association at 1-888-4-STROKE (1-888-478-7653) or visit us online at [StrokeAssociation.org](http://StrokeAssociation.org).
- If you or someone you know has had a stroke, call the American

Stroke Association's "Warmline" at 1-888-4-STROKE (1-888-478-7653), and:

- ✓ Speak with other stroke survivors and caregivers, trained to answer your questions and offer support
- ✓ Get information on stroke support groups in your area
- ✓ Sign up to get *Stroke Connection Magazine*, a free publication for stroke survivors and caregivers

## What are the Warning Signs of Stroke?

-  **Sudden weakness or numbness of the face, arm or leg, especially on one side of the body**
-  **Sudden confusion, trouble speaking or understanding**
-  **Sudden trouble seeing in one or both eyes**
-  **Sudden trouble walking, dizziness, loss of balance or coordination**
-  **Sudden, severe headaches with no known cause**



Learn to recognize a stroke. *Because time lost is brain lost.*

Today there are treatments that can reduce the risk of damage from the most common type of stroke, but only if you get help quickly — within 3 hours of your first symptoms.

Call 9-1-1 immediately if you experience these warning signs!

## Do you have questions for your doctor or nurse?

Take a few minutes to write your own questions for the next time you see your healthcare provider:

What can my family do to help me when I am emotional?

Will these emotional changes improve over time?

Is there a support group in my area?

*The statistics in this kit were up to date at publication. For the latest statistics, see the Heart Disease and Stroke Statistics Update at [americanheart.org/statistics](http://americanheart.org/statistics).*

*The American Stroke Association is a division of the American Heart Association. Your contributions will support research and educational programs that help reduce disability and death from stroke.*

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