About the National Stroke Foundation

The National Stroke Foundation is the only national not-for-profit organisation that works with stroke survivors, carers, health professionals, government and the public to reduce the impact of stroke on the Australian community. Our mission is to stop stroke, save lives and end suffering. We are the voice of stroke in Australia.

We will achieve this by:

- Raising awareness about the risk factors and signs of stroke and promoting healthy lifestyles.
- Improving treatment for stroke to save lives and reduce disability.
- Improving life after stroke for stroke survivors.
- Encouraging and facilitating stroke research.
- Raising funds from the community, corporate sector and government to continue our mission.

My Story - Journey After Stroke

When I got up in the morning I felt funny on one side, and I was wobbly… trying to walk. I didn’t know what it was… I was numb… But ah… my niece she said “What’s wrong Aunty J??…” She reckoned you got to go to the hospital. My heart was aching and I rang the ambulance… the ambulance they took me to hospital. They said that I had a stroke and a slight heart attack. I was frightened that I might have that, a bad case of the stroke.

Then I stayed in there, in hospital for a week. I had to exercise… I had to go walking… and they gave me tablets… two new tablets.

My niece helped me for like 3 weeks, then I went home to my own place, and my other niece… she helped me too… and, I couldn’t hardly hang clothes out cos my arm… my left arm… was a bit weak… lifting it up… you know? I’m frightened if I wipe plates up cos I might smash the plates. I just let it dry or wash it with one hand.

I couldn’t hardly walk… but I’m walking by myself now. I live on top of the hill and I get a lift down cos I am frightened that I might trip and I might roll down the hill!! (laugh)

Female stroke survivor from Palm Island
## Contents

What is a stroke? ................................................................. 2  
Why did I have a stroke? .................................................. 6  
Moving after stroke ......................................................... 8  
Food and drink ............................................................... 14  
Going to the toilet ............................................................ 17  
Communication .............................................................. 19  
Memory, thinking and seeing ........................................... 23  
Feelings ........................................................................ 27  
Making the most of your second chance ....................... 31  
Family and friends ......................................................... 38  
Contacts ........................................................................ 41  
Acknowledgements ......................................................... 42  
References ...................................................................... 43
What is a stroke?
What is a stroke?

A stroke is a bursting or blockage of a blood vessel in the brain. When this happens, blood doesn’t travel to all parts of the brain, so these parts can be damaged or die.
How do I know I am having a stroke?

- Sudden feeling of weak arm, leg or face
- Dizziness and losing your balance
- Talking funny
- Dribbling food and coughing when eating or drinking
- Can’t see properly

Stroke is serious.
Get help quickly.
CALL 000.
How do you know if someone's having a stroke? Think...

**F.A.S.T.**

- **FACE**: Check their FACE. Has their mouth drooped?
- **ARMS**: Can they lift both ARMS?
- **SPEECH**: Is their SPEECH slurred? Do they understand you?
- **TIME**: Time is critical. If you see any of these signs, call 000 now!

**Think F.A.S.T. Act FAST! CALL 000**

“Did you hear that Peter had a stroke?”

“Is he ok?”

“Well he’s pretty sick; he can’t talk, walk, and has problems remembering things.”

“Where is he now?”

“He’s in hospital getting better.”
Why did I have a stroke?
I am more likely to have a stroke if I:

- Smoke
- Am overweight
- Have high blood pressure (hypertension)
- Drink too much grog
- Have heart problems
- Have diabetes
- Have someone in my family who has had a stroke
- Have kidney problems

Will I get better after having a stroke?

- Every stroke is different
- Most people get a lot better
- Some people take longer
- Some people may not recover
- Your health team can help
Moving after stroke
After a stroke:

- Your leg and arm may be weak or not move at all
- You may not feel your leg or arm
- You may ignore or bump into things

Your health team can help you with:

- Getting in or out of bed
- Sitting in a chair
- Walking
- Getting dressed
- Eating and drinking
Starting exercises EARLY after a stroke is good

- You are more likely to get strong in the first few months after a stroke
- This is when you need to work hard
- Your health worker will give you the right exercises to do

To get better at moving you need to practice the right way.

Lots of practice is the way to go.
Train your brain

You need to teach your brain how to move your arm and/or leg again

Some exercises could be:

Sit to stand practice

- Feet firmly on ground
- Lean head and body over knees
- Push through legs, no hands
- Stand tall, keep your balance

Balance exercises
You need to look after your weak arm

- Shoulders can get sore if you don’t support them

Practicing using your arm

- Exercise may help to get your arm stronger

Your health worker will give you a sling if you need it
Equipment can help

Bath transfer bench
To get into and out of your bath

Over toilet frame
To get on and off the toilet

Foot splint
To help with standing and walking

Wheelchair
To help when you can’t walk far

Your health team will help you to decide what you need
Food & drink
Why am I having difficulty eating and drinking?

Some people have difficulty eating and drinking after a stroke. Sometimes food can go into your lungs instead of your belly. Your health team will help you to choose and advise how to eat food and drink safely. Sit up before you eat or drink.
Other things you can do:

- Take small mouthfuls
- Eat mushy food
- Make drinks thicker
- Some people need a feeding tube

If you cough when eating, get help.

After a stroke your eating and drinking will usually get better.

BE SAFE...
Have the right food and drink.

"Why does Bob eat so slowly now?"

"He’s gotta now he’s had a stroke. He’s being careful so the food goes down the right way. Gotta take small mouthfuls one at a time."
Going to the toilet
Going to the toilet

Some people have problems going to the toilet.

**Things that help:**

- Don’t drink coffee, tea, soft drinks and grog
- Go to the toilet every few hours
- You can get pads to stay dry
- Wear loose clothes

• **Infections in your waterworks can be common after stroke**

• **Drink lots of water**

• **If you have problems going to the toilet ask for help from a health worker**
Communication
Some problems with my talking might be:

- Trouble understanding
- Jumbled words
- Slurry voice
- Saying the right words
- Harder to read and write

Your health team will help you:

- Speak
- Understand
- Communicate
“Now Jimmy’s back from hospital, he’s always drunk - slurring and getting his words mucked up.”

“Jimmy’s not drunk. He’s had a stroke. You’ve just gotta give him time and listen properly.”

“But what if I still don’t have a clue?”

“That’s OK. Just ask Jimmy to say it again. He won’t mind.”
Family and friends can help too

Ask them to:

- Talk in short sentences
- Use body language
- Use writing or pictures
- Be clear
- Talk slowly

Remember:

- Listen to what they say
- Don’t worry about swearing
- Don’t yell
Memory, thinking and seeing
Memory and thinking

After a stroke you may:

- Forget some things or how to do things easily
- Have problems concentrating
- Get tired quickly

Seeing

You may:

- Have problems seeing things
- Not be able to see on one side
  - Bump into things
  - Have problems reading
- Need to be careful when crossing roads
- Need to see your doctor to return to driving
To help your memory:

- Think carefully about things
- Use your mobile phone alarm to set appointments
- Leave notes around your house to remember important things
- Check your newspaper, listen to the radio or TV to help remember the day and date
- Turn your head and look around if you can’t find things
- Sleep well
Get a medical clearance from your doctor before you return to driving

“Hey, what’s wrong with your car?”

“Nothing! Just need a clearance from the Doc before I can drive.”

“Ah, that sounds rough.”

“Nah... I’m not covered. Don’t want the bully man pulling me up ‘til I’m right.”
Feelings
Depression and withdrawal

You may feel lonely and sad.

- Talking really helps
- Think about what you can do
- Do something that you enjoy
- Spend time with family and friends

Adjustment

Change can be hard for you and your family.

- Learn about stroke with your family
  - Ask for help
- Be honest and patient with yourself
  - It takes time
Remember a stroke doesn’t mean you should stop having sex. Let your partner know how you think and feel.

“What you reckon, you comin’ to bed?”

“No, I’m scared you might have another stroke.”

“Yeah but they said it’s OK to have a bit of fun.”

“Well, come here then eh?”
Why do I get upset so easily?

After a stroke you may laugh or cry more.
Some people get upset easily.
This is normal.

Stroke is not a shame job.
You can have a good life after stroke.
Making the most of your second chance
Medicines

- Take your medicines at the right time
- Take your medicine with you when you go to see family, walkabout or away from home
- Put your medicines somewhere safe, out of reach of kids

Have regular checkups with the doctor.

“Hey, how come I see you going to the clinic every week?”

“Since that stroke, I gotta take that special medicine everyday and they check on my blood.”

“What’s that medicine do for you?”

“It helps to stop me from having another stroke.”

“I have to look after myself now.”

“True, you’ve been given a second chance, see ya brother.”
What you can do to reduce your risk of stroke:

- Stop smoking
- Stay off the grog
- Walk daily, play sport, go fishing and garden
- Get your blood pressure checked
- Take your medicine
- Get regular checkups with your doctor

Eat well

- Have more fruit and vegetables (fresh or frozen is great)
- Eat less fat
- Eat less salt
- Eat less take away
Maintain healthy weight
Eat good food

Reduce grog
Stop smoking

Eat good food
“Hey, I haven’t seen you for a while, you got any smokes?”

“Nah, I don’t smoke anymore, since I been in hospital with that stroke.”

“Which way, you still drink?”

“No way, I don’t smoke or drink any more, only good stuff for me from now on. I don’t wanna have another stroke.”

“Where you off to now?”

“I’m going for a walk to get some exercise, wanna come?”
Returning to work

Sometimes you need to:

- Work part-time
- Change jobs
- Apply for a Centrelink benefit

Your doctor can help.

Centrelink can also help:

- Indigenous Call Centre - 136 380
- Disability, Sickness and Carers - 132 717

Legal options

If you are not able to make big decisions for yourself, a family member or friend can help make decisions about you and your money.

This is called an Enduring Power of Attorney.

Ask your health team for more information.
Family and friends
How family and friends can help

Family and friends are important and can help.

- Family and friends can learn lots from the health team
- Encourage your relative or friend to do as much as he or she can
  - Be ready to help if needed
- Look after your own health - have breaks to keep you strong and healthy
I was laying in bed and I tried to turn on my right side and I couldn’t. Just didn’t take any note of it at the time. The next day I was sitting at my brother’s place on the front deck... and that’s when it happened... so quick... my nephew said to me... you look funny in the face you know...he started laughing... and I just said what’s the matter? I felt strange and I tried to get up to walk but I went off balance... I tried to ring the hospital and the ambulance and they came up and then I found out that I had a stroke.

That’s when they flew me from here into town... the hospital and I was there for about 6 or 7 weeks. They took me through the scanner, scanning my brain I couldn’t even talk because all my face was supposed to be one sided. My family was there but I just didn’t recognise that they were there.

After that I had to do the physio exercise. And that sort of got boring and I said to myself I want to get out of here, and I was determined to, you know, get up and walk. I started to walk on my own. I was in a wheelchair for a while. I spoke with a few doctors and they said half of your brains is dead... and it shocked me and I didn’t feel like, you know, one part there I was at a state of committing suicide.

Well I got used to it and I realised that I was not capable of doing the things that I could do before... and I had to set my mind and say I don’t want to stay at that level, and I want to get back over to my family. They were there to support me you know. I spoke with a doctor and he said you’ve gotta have a diet, stick to vegetables and all this... and I done it.

I was very glad to get home. Because in there you don’t have the people to come up and visit you. And it really made me try to do things to not let it overcome me. And I used to go to, do walks from here around to the airport. All the way on my own. I done it... and I said I don’t want no help. If a car pulled up “you want a lift”... I said “nah I’m doing my exercise”... and I done my exercise... done my walking. All the way.

But I like to let people know if you get that medication, take it don’t you know ignore it, take your medicine. Take your tablet whatever they give you. Don’t think you’re strong because this sort of... stroke it will come on you and it’ll rally you down to the lowest... you can’t do a thing for yourself. Gotta have a strong mind, a will to do things, not lay back and let others take charge of your life. That’s what I’d like to say... you know. Be determined to get out of that rut and be strong in what you do.

Male stroke survivor from Palm Island.
Contacts

National Stroke Foundation
Call StrokeLine: 1800 STROKE (787 653) or visit: www.strokefoundation.com.au

The Townsville Hospital Acute Stroke and Rehabilitation Unit
Phone: Clinical Nurse Consultant 07 4796 3396 or Medical Reception 07 4796 2120

Centrelink
Caring has many direct and hidden financial costs, which stretch the budget. Financial assistance is often available for both carers and survivors.
Indigenous Call Centre: 136 380 or Disability Sickness and Carers: 132717

Commonwealth Respite and Carelink Centre
The Commonwealth Carer Resource Centre provides referral to services and practical written information to support people who are carers.
Phone: 1800 052 222 or after hours 1800 059 059

Continence Foundation of Australia
Offers information and advice to families, carers and health professionals.
Phone: 1800 33 00 66 or visit: www.continence.org.au

Diabetes Australia
Representing people with diabetes, health professionals and researchers and has local offices in each state.
Phone: 1300 136 588 or visit: www.diabetesaustralia.com.au

Quitline
Provides advice and other assistance to smokers who want to kick the habit.
Phone: 13 7848 or visit: www.quitnow.gov.au

Vision Australia
Provides information and services for the visually impaired.
Phone: 1300 847 466 or visit: www.visionaustralia.org.au
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Diabetes Australia website: 

Journey After Spinal Cord Injury. 
North Queensland Spinal Service. 
Email: tsv-nq-spinal-service@health.qld.gov.au

National Stroke Foundation website: 
www.strokefoundation.com.au
Making the most of your second chance

You can have a good life after a stroke.