

What to Do If You're Regressing After Stroke

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Sometimes stroke survivors feel like they're regressing after stroke, and it can be quite unsettling.

For example, someone recently asked,

It has been over two years since my mother's stroke. She was doing great until all of a sudden she started getting worse. The doctor's don't know what caused it. Watching her fall apart is breaking my heart, we have no idea what to do. Can you help?

It seems that no one can find a clear answer as to why some patients start regressing after stroke, and the mystery can be quite distressing.

But instead of leaving you in the dark, we're going to take a look into what we know about regression after stroke so that you can get a better idea of what's going on.

Consult Your Doctor Immediately!

If your **post-stroke symptoms** have worsened, it's extremely important to seek medical attention immediately. It could be a sign of another underlying condition or even another stroke.

This is especially important if your symptoms have regressed in a matter of hours (for example, if you woke up one morning and your body is in much worse shape than when you fell asleep). Seek medical attention immediately.

If your doctor agrees that your symptoms are alarming, they might order a CT scan to see what's going on.

What If Your Doctor Can't Tell What's Wrong?

After seeking medical attention, hopefully you'll discover the cause and cure for your regression.

But, what if your doctor couldn't find anything? What if, even after a CT scan, they have no idea what caused your regression?

In this case, it's best to start asking yourself some questions about any lifestyle changes that recently happened.

Questions to Help You Identify the Cause of Regression

Have you been doing anything differently since you started to regress? Perhaps there's a link – one that only you can notice because you're much more familiar with your body/life than your doctor.

Were you taking any new medication when the regression started? Sometimes new medication can cause nasty side effects. For example, someone in our support group said that a new anti-depressant **caused her husband to regress**, and weaning him off the medication helped.

Are you overworking yourself? If you work your body too hard, you can definitely cause your body to crash. Try to scale back your exercise intensity and see if that helps.

What do YOU think has caused this? You know your body best. While a doctor might not be able to interpret the mystery behind regression after stroke, you might have a closer guess.

Understanding What Regression Is NOT

From what we have heard, signs of regression include a severe worsening of stroke side effects. For example, a severe worsening of arm movement is regression; or a severe worsening of speech is regression.

Here are some examples of what regression is NOT:

- More tiredness than normal
- Different emotions than normal
- Small declines in progress

Although tiredness and moodiness might seem like regression, they're actually quite normal.

Stroke recovery can really drain one's energy levels, and it's perfectly normal to **desire sleep all the time** or feel cranky. Trust that these are temporary phases and, if you keep sticking with your rehabilitation regimen, they will go away in time.

But what about small declines in progress?

Small Declines in Progress Are Not Regression

Stroke recovery often follows a “two steps forward one step back” pattern.

If you're the caregiver of a stroke survivor, it's understandable to freak out when you see your loved one's progress take a step back. **The key here is to understand the difference between a big decline that deserves medical attention and a small decline that's normal.**

During stroke recovery, you will have good days and bad days. Sometimes the bad days are bad weeks, and that's okay. When you zoom out and look at the big picture, there should always be a pattern of growth.

Little setbacks are normal and expected. And when you learn to expect them, you'll learn not to freak out when they happen.

Now, if you or your loved one suddenly experience a rapid decline in progress – a true regression – that's when you seek medical attention *immediately*.

How to Keep Your Progress Up

Now let's talk about some steps that you can take to help prevent regression after stroke.

First, **consistency is key** when it comes to stroke recovery. If you've experienced a regression, then the best way to start improving again is with consistent **repetitive practice**.

Your brain gets better at what you repeatedly do. So if your arm function has regressed, then it's time to start practicing arm exercises — and practice them consistently.

If you can, aim for every day or every other day. Don't push too hard and overwork yourself or burn yourself out. But make sure that you're getting the **necessary challenge** needed to activate **neuroplasticity** and rewire your brain.

Keep your practice up consistently and you should start to see improvement in time.

Understanding Regression After Stroke

Regression after stroke can be a scary time, and the fact that it remains mysterious is quite unsettling.

The best thing you can do is seek medical attention immediately. And if your doctor cannot figure out what's wrong, then the next best thing to do is get back to consistent, repetitive practice.

Stroke recovery naturally follows an ebb and flow pattern where you take two steps forward and one step back. Have faith that it's possible to overcome regression after stroke.