

The 5 Stages of Grief after Stroke

November 5, 2015



A stroke can cause a multitude of different side effects, like aphasia, paralysis, and short-term memory loss. However, the one overarching effect that impacts almost every stroke survivor is *loss* – the loss of freedom and independence. And dealing with loss means dealing with the five stages of grief.

In this article, we'll discuss the five stages of grief after stroke and provide ways of coping with each phase. Many survivors will not go through all of the phases, and sometimes the phases are experienced out of order. However, this overview will provide you with the information that you need to best understand your emotions. Let's start with the first stage:

Denial

Waking up in the hospital, you might have moments (or even days) of denial, where your brain adjusts to what previously seemed impossible.

Dealing with denial:

Because this stage is often fleeting, usually the passage of time is enough to help you cope with it. Once you're past the shock of what just happened, you can begin your recovery both [mentally](#) and [physically](#).

Anger

Anger is a stage of grief that most stroke survivors will go through. The stroke recovery process is full of obstacles that you must overcome, and this can often lead to anger. However, if you can learn to view your obstacles as opportunities for growth, you can begin to work past the anger stage.

Dealing with anger:

The only way to make your anger fade is to completely shift your mentality. Yes, we're advocating the whole "see the glass as half full" mantra, but it's also much more than that. You're not just looking at your situation in a positive light, but you're learning to look at it as a way to get *stronger*. Here are more tips to help you [cope with anger](#) after stroke.

Bargaining

Unlike anger, bargaining is a phase that many people don't experience. Bargaining occurs when you start making deals with a higher power through if/then statements. For example, "if I do all my rehab exercises, then please let me get back to normal again."

Dealing with bargaining:

Bargaining is one step towards recovery because it means that you're willing to do something. However, you're placing your fate out of your control, and that won't lead to your highest recovery. Instead, realize that you're in control of your fate, and that you already have the power to [achieve a full recovery](#). Yes that's right – we said it. The power lies within you, so start there first.

Depression

Like anger, post-stroke depression is a stage of grief that many stroke survivors will deal with. In fact, post-stroke depression often causes anger and vice versa.

Depression can stem from neurochemical changes in the brain and it can also be a symptom of feeling trapped and isolated inside your body. One thing you need to know about post-stroke depression is that **it does not make you weak**.

Dealing with depression:

We wrote a whole article on [dealing with post-stroke depression](#), where we discuss strategies like involving friends and family, digging into a new hobby, and building your self-esteem. We recommend getting friends and family involved as the first step, because they can help you with the rest. Remember, **socially connected people are the most resilient**. Although it's tempting to isolate yourself until your situation has improved, staying socially supported is extremely important.

Acceptance

Alas! The final stage of grief is acceptance where you have come to terms with and accepted your condition. You find yourself becoming opportunity-minded instead of problem-minded and have developed a sense of hope for the good times ahead.

Dealing with acceptance:

Wait, you have to deal with acceptance? Well, yes, you surprisingly do. Entering the acceptance stage does not mean that you can stop trying. Acceptance is an ongoing mental process that you have to work on every day. Otherwise you can slip backwards into the other stages of grief – and that's okay, as long as you can pick yourself back up. Remember to stay [opportunity-minded](#) and focused on the positive side of things.