

# Home from the Hospital: Caregi♥ing for a Stroke Survivor

An ebook from





## What is a Caregiver?

For the purposes of this eBook, a caregiver is an unpaid person (usually a spouse, partner, family member, friend, or neighbor) who assists with the daily activities of another person who can no longer care for himself or herself. A caregiver's role is vital in managing the care and rehabilitation of a loved one who has experienced a stroke. It can be demanding and sometimes frustrating, *but it's not hopeless*.

In fact, you're not alone! Approximately 43.5 million caregivers have provided unpaid care to an adult or child in the last 12 months.\* The Pew Research Center estimates that four in 10 adults in the U.S. are caring for an adult or child with significant health issues. With statistics like this, there are caregivers in every neighborhood, town, and city encountering the same struggles you may be facing.

♥ **More than 65 million** people, 29% of the U.S. population, provide care for a chronically ill, disabled, or aged family member or friend during any given year.\*\*

The average number of hours\* family caregivers spend caring for their loved ones is

**24.4 HOURS**

**More than 90%** of family caregivers become more proactive about seeking resources and skills they need to assist their care recipient after they have self-identified.\*\*

\*Source: National Alliance for Caregiving and AARP (2015). Caregiving in the U.S.

\*\*Source: Caregiver Action Network

# Caregiver Advice & Encouragement

Caregiving for a loved one recovering from a stroke requires patience, diligence, and attention to detail. Your loved one's recovery process means an adjusted reality for both of you. As a caregiver, you can provide support and resources to help the recovery and rehabilitation process.

## *Tips for Navigating the Rehabilitation Process*



### **Ask questions at the hospital:**

Ask the doctor and attending medical staff knowledgeable and informed questions about your loved one's condition, diagnosis, and specific medical needs. Writing down the information in a dedicated folder or notebook can help keep all medical information together and up-to-date, so you can remain informed. Keep this folder with you and bring it to all related doctor's appointments.



### **Look at your finances:**

Paying for the hospital care can be a big expense, even with insurance or medicaid. Contact your insurance company to find out what is covered. [The Patient Advocate Foundation](#) may be able to help with navigating medical expenses. If your loved one can no longer work and needs full-time care, you may need to consider hiring a professional assistant if you need to work to provide income for your family.



### **Conduct your own research at home:**

When you leave the hospital, read up on your loved one's specific medical condition and add it to your notes. Understanding your loved one's condition will help you ask the right questions at future doctor's appointments.

Depending on the severity of your loved one's stroke, you might expect to meet with the following medical professionals:

- Primary care doctor
- Neurologist
- Cardiologist
- Social Worker
- Speech-language pathologist
- Occupational therapist
- Physical therapist
- Psychiatrist





### **Monitor your loved one's moods and promote a healthy lifestyle:**

Dealing with the aftermath of a stroke might cause some emotional distress for your loved one. If you see signs of depression, contact your doctor. Encouraging your loved one to exercise, eat a healthy diet, and eliminate bad habits (such as smoking or excessive alcohol intake) will help him or her to reduce chances of another stroke. Be sure to help your loved one stay on track with any medications that are prescribed by a doctor.



### **Sit in on appointments:**

Following a stroke, your loved one will have a lot of appointments with a variety of doctors, nurses, and rehabilitation specialists. If your schedule allows, try to attend an appointment so you can see the type of rehabilitation exercises physical, occupational, and/or speech therapists try with your loved one.



### **Don't give up:**

Regardless of where your love one is in their stroke recovery process, don't give up. Talk to a social worker at the hospital or discuss additional treatment options with your doctor.







# Connect with a Community

## Find a Support Group:

Across the country are support groups for stroke survivors and their caregivers. They meet in hospitals, churches, community centers, aphasia centers, etc. Find the one closest to you and connect with others who are going through similar experiences.



## Connect Online:

In addition to in-person support groups, many online communities for stroke survivors and caregivers exist. You can find these groups on Facebook and through the [American Stroke Association](#) caregiving portal.



There are an estimated **6.5 million** stroke survivors in the United States today.\*

\*Caregiver.org

# Taking Care of Yourself



## Find a routine:

You had a full and active life before you became a caregiver. Take time to do the things you love; you'll be a better caregiver if you take care of yourself too!



## Rest and Rejuvenate:

As the primary caregiver, you might feel overwhelmed from time to time. Seek a team of trusted friends, family members, or neighbors who can step in and provide temporary care so you can rest or take time for yourself.



## Provide Specific Instructions:

When your temporary aide arrives, remember to give them detailed and specific instructions for your loved one's care. Whether it's providing medicine or a meal, your support team will rely on you for a detailed to-do list.

Looking for temporary care to assist you? Try the following services:

- Adult or Senior Day Centers
- Local Nursing Homes
- Home Healthcare and Professional Aides
- Assisted Living Facilities
- Community Centers



## Find support from the following groups online:

Lingraphica – [www.aphasia.com](http://www.aphasia.com)

American Stroke Association – [www.strokeassociation.org](http://www.strokeassociation.org)

Aphasia Recovery Connection – [www.arcaphasia.org](http://www.arcaphasia.org)

Caregiver Action Network – [www.caregiveraction.org](http://www.caregiveraction.org)

Ageing Care – [www.ageingcare.com](http://www.ageingcare.com)

Strokeboard – [www.strokeboard.net](http://www.strokeboard.net)

# Tips for Communicating with your Loved One

Following a stroke, your loved one may experience difficulty communicating. Depending on the severity of his or her stroke, this communication loss may be temporary or permanent. Use these tips from other stroke survivors and caregivers to communicate.

## 1. Practice patience

Your loved one may understand what you are saying, but he or she probably needs additional time to formulate his or her response to you. Be patient as they find the words or gestures to answer you.

## 2. Find supportive items

Many caregivers find a whiteboard to be helpful at communicating messages. This method may diminish frustration and confusion. Others suggest using a whiteboard to write messages, spell words, or draw pictures to communicate a message. If you find this approach useful, consider keeping several whiteboards around so one is easy to find when you're in a conversation or communication breakdown. Other alternatives to whiteboards include a pen and paper, a notepad or even pictures of common household items.

## 3. Ask descriptive questions

Individuals with language loss often get their words mixed up. Some suggest asking detailed questions to help them find the right term. For example, asking, "What do you want for lunch?" might be too broad. Try to narrow it down to, "Would you like a ham or turkey sandwich for lunch?"

## 4. Remove excess background noise

Additional noises can make it difficult for anyone to focus, but especially individuals with speech and language challenges. Try turning off the television and/or radio, and asking others to keep conversation down when you're trying to communicate with your loved one.

## 5. Ask permission before helping your loved one speak

Many people try to offer clues or guesses to what your loved one wants to say. This method can confuse or shift your loved one's thinking and cause extreme frustration. Try asking permission during a communication pause before you jump in with suggestions.

### Common Household Items You Can Use to Support Communication:

- Pen and paper
- Whiteboard
- Notepad
- Pictures of common objects cut out from magazines



If you have questions about caregiving for a stroke survivor, Lingraphica can help. Our team of communication specialists are here to support and encourage you. Call us at 866-843-1775!

