

5 Surprising Reasons for Emotional Changes After Stroke

May 25, 2018



Emotional changes after stroke often happen for reasons that seem invisible. To help bring clarity to this time of change, we're going to discuss the top 5 reasons for emotional changes after stroke. We will also provide various treatment options for each.

Let's start with the least-obvious reason...

1. Damage to the Emotion Center of the Brain

The right hemisphere of the brain controls emotions. So if you had a right-brain stroke, then it's possible that it damaged your brain's emotions center. This is a condition known as emotional lability, which is characterized by random outbursts of emotion, like laughter or crying. Often, the outbursts don't match the situation. For example, you might laugh at something trivial like spilled milk. While this might not seem like a problem, the random outbursts of tears can affect your quality of life. Luckily, there are a couple ways to treat it.

Treatment:

Since the brain gets better at what you repeatedly practice (thanks to good ol' neuroplasticity), it's possible to *rewire your emotions through practice*. This is a strange concept that requires heavy explanation, so if you're interested, see this [guide to emotional lability](#).

Another way to treat emotional lability is with medication. While this doesn't address the cause, sometimes it's very necessary for your mental health and motivation to pursue recovery. Talk to your doctor to see if medication is right for you.

2. Loss of Independence

Stroke often causes serious side effects that can restrict your independence. When you suddenly rely on others to eat, bathe, and move around, it can really damage your sense of self-efficacy. This loss of independence and confidence can lead to depression and/or anxiety.

Treatment:

If you struggle with lack of confidence after stroke, then psychotherapy might be a good option for you. With the help of a therapist, you can dig deeper into the psychological reasons behind emotional distress.

You can also pick up a copy of our book [Healing and Happiness After Stroke](#) to learn ways to boost confidence after stroke.

3. Fear of Having Another Stroke

From our years of experience working with stroke survivors, we have noticed that the fear of having another stroke is quite common. It's perfectly normal to feel this fear, and we understand that it can cause anxiety – sometimes extreme anxiety.

Treatment:

Being prepared by understanding your stroke risk factors and taking action to reduce your risk of stroke is a great way to reduce this anxiety. This is also another area where psychotherapy might help, because a therapist can give you tools to deal with anxiety.

4. Grief and Loss

Grief is common after stroke, and it's usually overlooked! Not many people associate the losses that accompany stroke (like loss of independence, mobility, hobbies) with grief. But if you were once identified with your previous life (like most people are!), then stroke recovery will likely involve grief. And it's normal.

Treatment:

Understanding the stages of grief (11/5/2015) can help you cope. The most important thing to do is allow yourself to go through the emotions of anger and depression (in healthy ways). Grief is healed by moving through it, not around it.

Once you allow yourself to fully feel these heavy feelings, you can move into the final stage of grief: acceptance.

5. Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder

PTSD is another overlooked cause of emotional changes after stroke. Stroke is a traumatic, life-threatening event, and sometimes that trauma can lead to PTSD.

Some signs of PTSD are:

- Isolating yourself from others
- Feeling on guard or numb
- Increased anxiety
- Outbursts of anger

Treatment:

The best treatment for PTSD is psychotherapy and antidepressants. Medication can provide essential relief from overwhelming negative emotion, and therapy can help you process and cope with your feelings. Sensory treatment can also be effective. You can learn more in our guide to PTSD after stroke (5/20/2016).

Navigating Emotional Changes After Stroke

These are the top 5 reasons for emotional changes after stroke, but it's not a comprehensive list. The cause for your emotional changes might be different from these. On the other hand, you might suffer from multiple things on this list.

Wherever you are on your stroke recovery journey, know that you are perfectly normal and capable of finding healing.