

Understanding and Working Through the Many Faces of Post Stroke Depression

February 10, 2016



These 10 causes of post stroke depression address the underlying issues that are often overlooked.

Please note that post stroke depression is a side effect that should be taken very seriously and not pawned off as something that'll pass with time. Doing something about it now can help boost your health, happiness, and recovery for the long run.

Foreword: Depression from Brain Injury

If your stroke has damaged the part of your brain responsible for emotion, then it can cause post stroke depression. This type of depression can be treated in two ways: your doctor can prescribe medication or recommend therapy, or you can adjust your lifestyle to naturally combat depression. Sometimes medication and therapy are exactly what you need. Other times simple lifestyle changes can make a world of difference.

Sift through these lifestyle problems that can cause post stroke depression and start making small changes. They could have a marvelous ripple effect on your overall happiness.

1. Depression from Lack of Social Support

Keeping friends and family close during stroke recovery is essential. The simple hug from a friend or loved one triggers the release of the hormone [oxytocin](#), which is responsible for feeling good!

We also need social support so that we feel heard. When we feel like someone understands us and understands the pain we're going through, it makes it much easier to deal with. The process of talking about your feelings within itself can be transformational.

If your friends and family members have trouble relating to you, try finding stroke support groups in your area. You can also try looking for support groups on Facebook where stroke survivors post about their experience and provide emotional support.

2. Depression from Bad Posture

Posture is weirdly important. As Amy Cuddy explains in this revolutionary [TedTalk](#), our posture radically affects who we are. And there are certain poses that can affect your state of being for the better. Amy calls it 'Power Posing.' All you need to do is sit or stand up straight and raise your arms up and out to your sides. Make yourself as big as possible, and it will change your body chemistry.

In Amy's study, participants who used Power Posing experienced more presence, confidence, and comfortability in their body – *just from changing their posture*. When we make ourselves small, we feel small. And when we make ourselves big, we feel strong and capable.

Try it for yourself right now and see if you can feel the difference. (If mobility issues make Power Posing a problem, check out these [arm exercises \(9/11/2015\)](#) and [core/balance exercises \(9/18/2015\)](#))

3. Depression from Loss of Control

When a huge chunk of control is taken away from us, it negatively affects our psychology.

After a stroke, it's likely that you're dealing with physical, mental, and emotional changes, and many of these changes are out of your control. For example, if stroke hindered your ability to move, then you might feel like you've lost control of your body. If stroke has impacted the way you execute the Activities of Daily Living, then you might feel like you've lost control of your independence.

There's a way to restore your sense of control, and it starts by changing your mindset. When we focus on our problems, they become bigger problems. But when we shift our attention away from our problems, then the present moment becomes available to us. When we can live in the moment without worrying about the future or mulling over the past – we can just let ourselves be. And there's immense freedom in that.

When you turn inward and meet your anger and frustration with presence, you can overcome depression associated with loss of control – *because you are in total control of this present moment*. It's a powerful realization, and it could change the way you feel on the drop of a dime.

This attention shift and profound awareness is very similar to meditation.

4. Depression from Not Meditating

Stroke survivors have been talking about the importance of meditation for a while now.

Meditation should be a part of every single stroke rehabilitation regimen because it helps reduce depression, grow your brain, develop emotional strength, and reduce stress. Yes, all that just from meditating. Upon learning how good meditation is for your stroke recovery, you might make up your mind to meditate every morning (and you should!). But actually getting around to it is a whole other story.

A simple way to get yourself to meditate is to schedule it into your day and be disciplined about it. Then it will become a habit and you won't have to exert as much willpower to get yourself to do it anymore.

Also, if you feel frustrated or impatient with your meditation practice, rest assured that it will get easier with time. Your brain adapts to whatever you focus on; so if you're focusing on meditation every day, your brain will get better at meditation every day. Meditation is one of those things you *have* to do if you want to get better. Take it from a fellow stroke survivor.

5. Depression from Poor Nutrition

A common culprit of post stroke depression is an unhealthy microbiome, which is the ecosystem of 100 trillion little microbes in your gut. When your gut is healthy, it fosters a healthy brain and healthy emotions. When your gut is unhealthy, it can lead to depression and brain fog.

To maintain a healthy microbiome, you need to have probiotics in your diet. You can find probiotics in fermented foods yogurt, tempeh, keifer, and sauerkraut. If your microbiome was the cause of your depression, you'll start to feel better almost immediately upon healing your gut with probiotics.

6. Depression from Lack of Fun

Fun is important. It's what keeps us happy, connected, and fulfilled. Sometimes a stroke hinders your ability to participate in activities and hobbies you once enjoyed. If that's the case, it's time to find something new.

Stroke recovery is an opportunity to discover something new about yourself – and a new hobby is a great place to start. (Recreational therapy is an even better place to start.) Whatever your passion is, try to find a creative way of fitting it into your life.

7. Depression from Lack of Movement

If the limitations of your recovery have compromised your sense of personal freedom, there's a way to reclaim it. No matter how well you can move, you can move a little – and that's all you need to help alleviate your depression. Try activities like water aerobics or Dance Movement Therapy (don't worry, you don't actually have to know how to dance). They're gentle forms of movement that help liberate you from feelings of restriction.

If you're living with hemiplegia, there's one form of movement that you can always come back to: your breath. Whenever you're feeling trapped or limited, just breathe.

Pull yourself into the moment and try not to judge, label, or change anything about yourself or your situation. Simply breathe and let yourself be. There is immense freedom in this state of being.

8. Depression from Lack of Presence

We've been talking about the power of presence and mindfulness a lot in this post, but it's a scientifically-proven way to be happier. Living in the present moment is one of the most effective ways to reduce depression and boost happiness because your depression exists in dwelling on the past or worry about the future; depression exists in thoughts and labels. When you remove those thoughts and labels, you're free.

It doesn't come all at once, but if meditation and living a mindful life can get you there. This will train your brain to live more in the present moment and stop thinking depressive thoughts. It's all made possible by the power of neuroplasticity.

The more you focus on something – like the enjoying present moment – the better your brain becomes at that task. So if you continuously practice patience, acceptance, and peace, then you'll naturally become skillful at being patient, tolerant, and peaceful. Whatever you focus on, you become.

9. Depression from a Fixed Mindset

Do you feel like you're stuck in your recovery? If so, you probably have a fixed mindset that's feeding you limiting thoughts and fostering this feeling of stuck-ness. To succeed in your recovery and avoid depressive thoughts, you need to develop a growth mindset. Someone with a growth mindset believes in their potential. They believe that there's always room for growth and they put effort into turning their weaknesses into strengths.

You can develop a growth mindset by replacing negative, limiting thoughts with positive, empowering ones. The switches start consciously and purposefully – maybe for a designated 15 minutes every day – but eventually it will become a habit. And once you've developed a habit of thinking positively, even your subconscious thoughts will be positive.

It's how the brain works, and it's how you can set yourself up for a successful recovery.

10. Depression from Low Self-Esteem

The losses associated with stroke can take a devastating toll on your self-image and self-esteem. Self-esteem is knowing that you are worthy of happiness. Knowing it is one thing. Working towards feeling it is the next step.

To improve your self-esteem, you don't have to wait until you've gotten 'back to normal.' You can find happiness and confidence right now; it just requires some personal development. For starters, you can read some books on self-esteem like [The Six Pillars of Self-Esteem](#); or you can listen to some motivational, self-help videos ([Tony Robbins](#) is a great place to start).

Whatever resonates with you, do that and do it often. Because we are what we repeatedly do, and if you can rewire your brain for happiness, then post stroke depression will begin to subside. It just requires time, effort, and support from loved ones.