

Understanding Personality Changes After Stroke

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Personality changes after stroke can be difficult to pinpoint because there are so many factors at play.

To understand the various ways that stroke can affect personality, we are going to look at the following areas:

- The 3 areas of personality change
- The parts of the brain that can create personality changes
- The attitude and lifestyle changes that can affect personality

Let's start with the basics:

What Is Personality?

To determine how a stroke changed your personality, we need to first look at what personality even is. Here's a classic definition:

“Personality refers to individuals’ characteristic patterns of thought, emotion, and behavior, together with the psychological mechanisms — hidden or not — behind those patterns. This definition means that among their colleagues in other subfields of psychology, those psychologists who study personality have a unique mandate: to explain whole persons.”

So it seems that personality comes from our thoughts, emotions, and behavior. Now let’s look at how stroke affects each of these 3 areas.

Personality Changes After Stroke

Thoughts:

Sometimes stroke affects the part of the brain responsible for memory, thinking, and reasoning. Therefore, a stroke survivor’s regular thought patterns may change after stroke. For example, someone who is patient may develop impatient characteristics due to new thought patterns. Or, someone who is typically impatient may actually become more patient due to changes in their thought patterns.

Every stroke is different (10/17/2016), and every survivor will have their personality impacted differently.

Emotions:

Sometimes a stroke affects the emotion center of the brain and creates a stroke side effect called emotional lability. This stroke side effect is characterized by uncontrollable emotions, which may affect a survivor’s personality. Stroke recovery can also affect emotions simply due to the radically different lifestyle involved. Emotions like depression, anxiety, and grief are unfortunately common after stroke.

You can learn more about emotional changes after stroke here (1/6/2016).

Behavior:

And finally, stroke may create behavioral changes due to the impact of the stroke. When thoughts, reasoning, mobility, and emotions are all impacted by neurological injury, it can have a profound impact on someone’s behavior and personality. For example, if a stroke survivor once identified himself as a tough, rugged athlete but stroke took away his ability to move, then his personality may change. He may suddenly question who he is and move into a different way of being.

Identity issues like these, as well as emotional changes and post-stroke depression, are all addressed in our stroke recovery book *Healing & Happiness After Stroke*.

Personality Changes due to Brain Damage

Aside from lifestyle changes, personality changes can be directly caused by brain damage. According to Jon Stone, a [consultant neurologist](#), personality changes can be associated with damage in specific areas of the brain; particularly the cerebellum and frontal lobes. Jon states that a stroke in the cerebellum can trigger a personality shift because this section of the brain controls many executive functions. Personality changes can also occur if there is damage to the frontal lobes, which play an essential role in regulating emotion, decision making, and judgement.

If you are worried that your personality has changed (or the personality of your loved one), be sure to take the impact of stroke into account.

Positive Personality Changes due to Attitude

Jon also makes a very interesting point: a stroke can affect someone's personality in a *positive* way, too. Although the positive side effects of stroke are rarely talked about, it's worth pointing out that a stroke can potentially cause a positive upswing in personality, especially if a mild frontal lobe impairment led to decreased anxiety. So, not all personality changes after stroke are negative.

Jon also mentions that sometimes serious illness causes people to reevaluate their lives. This can lead to a positive shift in attitude, best characterized by the popular saying, "I survived for a reason." (Yes you did!)

When serious illness happens that threatens your life, it can serve as a 'wake-up call' for some and lead to new ways of thinking and behaving.

Negative Personality Changes due to Attitude

Unfortunately, this can also happen in the opposite way. Sometimes it feels like stroke took everything away from a survivor, and it can push that survivor into a severe state of apathy. Sometimes this can manifest as intense depression or anger.

A great way to cope with this type of personality change is with proper social support. When someone suffers from apathy and depression, it can help immensely to be surrounded by others who also deal with the same situation. A support group is a great place to find connection and advice.

Personality Changes due to Lifestyle

To best understand how the lifestyle of stroke recovery affects personality after stroke, it's best to put yourself in a stroke survivor's shoes. To get a small taste of what stroke recovery is like (emphasis on small), imagine losing your ability to do all the typical activities of everyday life; like walking, eating, and talking. Imagine that suddenly, simple everyday tasks are a drain, cooking takes fifty times longer, and you can't participate in your favorite hobbies anymore. Everything in your life is suddenly *vastly* different and it wasn't something that you asked for.

Wouldn't that change the way you behave, too? Aside from changes to the brain after stroke, many personality changes are caused by changes to a stroke survivor's daily life. Having empathy and perspective can help you understand where these personality changes are coming from.

Summary

Stroke recovery is very demanding on a survivor, and it's perfectly normal to experience personality changes after stroke. These changes could be caused by damage to certain areas of the brain that regulate the thoughts, emotions, and behavior that comprise our personality. Other personality changes could be caused by the drastic change in lifestyle following stroke.

Either way, if you are a stroke survivor or caregiver, it's important to practice empathy and find social support to help during challenging times like these.