Brain Stem Stroke 101: When Stroke Affects Both Sides of the Body

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If you or someone you know have experienced a brain stem stroke that has affected both sides of the body, then you probably have a lot of questions.

While your doctor and neurologist are best suited for answers (they're the ones with your brain scans) they're not always around for quick advice. That's where we come in.

In this article, you'll learn how a brain stem stroke can affect both sides of the body, and you'll also learn how to treat the side effects. Be sure to talk to your neurologist when you can, though, because they'll have the most specific advice for your situation.

Ready to dig in?

Let's start with some brief brain anatomy.

The Cause of Stroke Affecting Both Sides of the Body

The brain is divided into two hemispheres, with each half controlling the other side of the body.

Your left hemisphere controls the right side of your body and the right hemisphere controls the left side of your body.

Most often, stroke occurs in one side of the brain and results in physical impairments on the opposite side of the body.

When both sides of the body are affected, however, then it could be the result of multiple strokes occurring in both hemispheres of the brain, or it was caused by a brain stem stroke.

The brain stem communicates between both sides of the brain. When the brain stem is damaged, both side of the body can become impaired.

This poses a greater challenge to overcome, but recovery is absolutely possible.

Side Effects of a Brain Stem Stroke

If your neurologist has confirmed that you have sustained a brain stem stroke, then you may have some or all of these side effects:

- Difficulty controlling your breath
- Difficulty speaking and swallowing
- Partial or complete hearing loss
- Impaired vision
- Weakness of the limbs
- Paralysis
- Numbness or loss of sensation

Unfortunately, recovery from multiple strokes or brain stem stroke is more difficult, and the long-term outlook is less favorable compared to other strokes.

However, don't let that stop you from pursuing a robust recovery, because you can improve your stroke side effects through effective therapy.

Your Best Investment: Therapy

There are many different kinds of therapy that can help you recover from the various side effects of a brain stem stroke or multiple strokes:

Physical and occupational therapy can help improve movement in your body and reintroduce sensation in your body.

Useful guides:

- How to Improve Movement Recovery After Stroke
- Sensory Reeducation After Stroke (Learning How to Feel Again)

Speech therapy can help improve your ability to speak and swallow.

Useful guides:

- How to Treat Aphasia (When Stroke Affects Speech)
- How to Treat Swallowing Problems after Stroke

Vision therapy can help improve your eye coordination and vision.

Useful guides:

- The Ultimate Guide to Treating Vision Problems After Stroke

How to Get the Most Out of Therapy

The reason why therapy helps relieve your stroke side effects is because it activates neuroplasticity, which helps heal your brain.

Neuroplasticity is the most important ingredient for recovery from stroke. It's the mechanism that your brain uses to rewire itself and build new skills or, in this case, relearn old skills.

When there is damage to the brain, neuroplasticity allows your brain to rewire healthy parts of the brain to take over.

Neuroplasticity will help you get your life back.

Now let's talk about the best way to activate neuroplasticity.

The Best Way to Treat Stroke Side Effects

The best way to activate neuroplasticity is through repetition.

Each time you repeat something, specific neurons in your brain fire. The more those neurons fire, the stronger the neural pathways become.

Strong neural pathways result in skills. For example, a baseball player who spends an hour a day throwing a ball will develop strong neural pathways regarding hand eye coordination.

Similarly, a stroke survivor who spends an hour a day exercising his arm will develop strong neural pathways regarding arm coordination.

You get better at what you repeatedly practice because your brain loves to adapt itself to your patterns.

Hope for Brain Stem Stroke & Recovery from Multiple Strokes

In severe cases, sometimes brain stem strokes or multiple strokes leave a patient unconscious.

In other cases, patients regains consciousness and have the ability to work towards regaining their lives by rewiring their brain through repetitive practice.

Knowing that neuroplasticity is on your side should provide tons of hope for stroke recovery.

It means that healing IS possible as long as you put in the work.