

13 Post Stroke Side Effects You Should Know About

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Your post stroke side effects can vary greatly from other survivors, so it's important to understand what complications might arise as you progress through your recovery. Let's start with the most common post stroke side effect:

13. Difficulty Swallowing

Swallowing problems, also known as dysphagia, occur when the part of your brain responsible for your throat muscles becomes impaired. This can lead to coughing, drooling, difficulty swallowing, and aspirations (inhaling food or drink into your wind pipe).

Here are some tips to make things easier (article 12/31/2015) :

- Eat soft foods
- Drink thick liquids
- [Be mindful of your body](#)

Sometimes aspirations or coughing are simply the result of poor posture, which can be improved through balance exercises.

12. Balance Problems

Balance problems occur because only half your muscles were affected by the stroke and your body hasn't adjusted to this sudden muscular imbalance yet. You can improve your balance through rehab exercises that involve both **unilateral and bilateral movements**. To determine how good or bad your balance is right now, we recommend the **single leg stand test (article 12/18/2015)**. You should do the test each week and record your progress so that you can see how much you're improving.

11. One-Sided Neglect

Have you ever had someone talk to you and you didn't even hear them? You didn't even see them? If that person was standing on your affected side, then you could be suffering from **one-sided neglect (article 11/13/2015)**. This post stroke side effect can be treated by purposefully bringing attention into your affected side. For example, try putting the remote on your affected side so that you have to pay attention to it. Or, have a family member sit on your affected side when they talk to you. This will help train your brain to start paying attention to that side.

10. Incontinence

Incontinence is the inability to control your bladder and bowel movements. Unfortunately, this side effect can be embarrassing for some survivors, and they purposely avoid drinking water so that they don't have to pee as much. This is really, really bad for your health and you *should not* do this. Dehydration aggravates fatigue and deprives your body of the element it needs to thrive. So treat your body well and use **the tips in the article on 11/12/2015** to deal with incontinence.

9. Emotional Changes

Emotional changes after stroke can include depression, anxiety, anger, and frustration. Depression is, unfortunately, by far the most common emotional change after stroke. What many survivors don't know is that post stroke depression can sometimes be effectively treated with probiotics.

If you're not sure if you're suffering from post stroke depression, see [this article](#) to find out.

Another common emotional side effect is **anxiety**. If you're afraid that you'll never get better or if you lose sleep because you're up all night worrying about your recovery, then you might be suffering from post stroke anxiety. While you can talk with your doctor to get medication for anxiety, you can usually **alleviate it through mindfulness**.

And lastly, frustration is an emotion that can erupt when you're fed up with the limitations of your recovery. You can cope with frustration in 2 ways:

- You can use **acceptance and gratitude** to make it go away
- You can change your situation by **fully understand what stroke recovery is about (article 9/21/2015)**

We recommend doing both.

8. Communication

When a stroke affects the language area of your brain, it can cause difficulty of speech. This condition is known as **aphasia**, and your **speech-language pathologist** will help you choose the best method for getting your speech back.

Tips for living with aphasia:

It's very helpful to establish a topic before starting a conversation. This helps the other person anticipate what you're going to say instead of trying to guess, which helps alleviate frustration on both ends.

Singing therapy:

If you have severe aphasia and can't utter a single word, you might be able to *sing* your words. This is possible because speaking and singing are controlled by different sides of the brain. Language is managed by your left-brain and singing and melody are managed by your right-brain. During **singing therapy**, survivors learn how to sing their sentences until the skills transfer over and they're able to speak those sentences normally again.

7. Seizures

About 5% of survivors will experience seizures after stroke. It's important to educate family and caregivers of how to treat you in case you do experience a seizure. When someone is having a seizure, it's important to roll them on their side to prevent choking. Please read [further instruction on how to handle seizures here](#). Although 5% of survivors experience seizures, it does not mean that you will develop epilepsy.

6. Headaches

In our **stroke support group**, we have heard numerous survivors talk about experiencing headaches after stroke. It's not uncommon to experience headaches after stroke. However, if the pain is severe or persists for longer than a normal headache, then call your doctor immediately.

5. Learned Nonuse

The phrase 'use it or lose it' refers to a very concerning – and very real – post stroke side effect called **learned nonuse**. Essentially, your brain can completely forget how to use your affected limbs if you start to neglect them. This is why it's sooo important to move your affected limbs at least a little every day.

4. Spasticity

Spasticity is the most common post stroke side effect, resulting in painful muscle cramps, stiff joints, and limited range of motion. Spasticity is caused by **miscommunication between your brain and your muscles**. Some treatment options for include:

- Physical therapy (or at-home rehab exercises)
- Orthotics

- TENS therapy
- Botox (the only FDA-approved injectable treatment option)
- Surgery

Whichever option you choose, be sure to keep your affected limb moving in some way or another. It might be uncomfortable, but it will prevent your brain from completely forgetting how to use those muscles through a phenomenon known as learned nonuse. So prevent this devastating loss by sneaking a little movement into your every day.

3. Foot Drop

Foot drop involves difficulty lifting the front part of your foot, making it drop towards the floor when you lift your leg. This can make walking difficult and dangerous. Treatment options for foot drop include:

- Rehab exercise
- AFOs
- TENS therapy

The rehab exercises you'll want to perform should involve your lower legs and feet, like **toe-to-heel rocks**. You can also use AFOs (ankle foot orthotics), which are supportive braces that go inside your shoes and help keep your foot from dropping. And lastly, you can use electrical stimulation (TENS therapy) to activate the muscles in your lower legs. This stimulation helps re-teach your nerves and muscles to function properly and return to a **normal gait**.

2. Curled Toes

Curled toes are another side effect that makes walking difficult and sometimes even painful. Curled toes are the result of spasticity in your feet and toes, causing your foot muscles to over-contract and curl your toes when you don't want them to. Treatment to curled toes includes:

- AFOs
- TENS therapy
- Botox
- Surgery

Unlike drop foot, AFOs for curled toes will have built in toe crests and metatarsal pads that will help keep your toes aligned and comfy. You will need to talk with your orthotist to get a custom AFO made for your foot.

TENS therapy can help stimulate the nerves and muscles in your foot to help the muscles relax and uncurl.

Botox is an injectable treatment for spasticity that's only FDA-approved for upper limb spasticity. However, you can still talk with your doctor about Botox treatments for your curled toes. (It's been done before and many survivors see great improvement.)

The last resort is surgery where they cut the tightened tendons in your foot to release your curled toes. This surgery is irreversible however, so explore all your other options first.

1. Tiredness, Sleepiness, and Fatigue

If you constantly feel **tired after stroke**, don't be alarmed. *It's perfectly normal.* Sleep is good for stroke recovery. It helps your brain detoxify, heal, and absorb all the useful information from your rehab exercises. In other words, sleep actually helps improve movement recovery.

But sometimes **sleeping disorders** get in the way, so talk with your doctor if you have trouble sleeping. Many stroke survivors think their sleeping problems will go away in time – but if you keep waiting for that day to come, then you're draining your mental battery and hindering your recovery in the meantime.

But sometimes **tiredness** isn't the result of sleep deprivation – it could be a different kind of side effect: **fatigue**. Post stroke fatigue can be caused by something as simple as dehydration, so be sure that you're getting adequate water intake. Another way to alleviate fatigue after stroke is to reduce your environmental stimulation and start daily meditation. (It's seriously helpful.)

We hope this guide to post stroke side effects was useful. If you find yourself experiencing anything out of the ordinary, please contact your doctor as soon as possible.

It's always better to be safe than sorry!