

Stroke Recovery Prognosis Part 4: Emotional Stroke Side Effects + Treatments

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Welcome to part 4 of our stroke recovery prognosis series - Part 4: How to treat the emotional side effects of stroke.

Unfortunately, the majority of stroke survivors develop depression and anxiety. Some also develop a condition known as emotional lability. Let's discuss each in detail, plus good treatment options for each.

1. Depression

Depression is often caused by the major setbacks that accompany stroke recovery. If you have developed depression after stroke, then know that you are not alone, and there are plenty of people who are willing to offer help and a supporting hand. It can also be caused by damage to the emotion center of the brain.

Treatment:

Because depression is a huge topic, we are going to discuss 3 different treatment options.

1. Gather a solid support system.

Getting proper support is essential for relieving depression. Humans are wired for connection, so this is a critical step. Reach out to friends and family and don't be afraid to ask for help. You can also join a local stroke support group, or our stroke support group on Facebook and find support there.

2. Consider medication if depression is preventing you from pursuing recovery.

If the emotion center of your brain was damaged (your neurologist will be able to provide this information), then you may suffer from clinical depression, and medication might be a good option to consider. If you're not sure if you can benefit from medication for depression after stroke, talk with your doctor.

3. Work on yourself and find emotional healing.

Lastly, the best way to help lift yourself out of depression is by working on your emotional healing. This topic is so deep, that we wrote a whole book on it called *Healing & Happiness After Stroke*. If you want to find emotional healing and lift yourself from depression, then our book is a great guide.

2. Anxiety

Anxiety can develop after stroke, especially if you tend to have fearful thoughts. In fact, that's the main cause of anxiety: fearful mental patterns that trigger your fight-or-flight response and manifest as tense sensations in your body. Because anxiety first starts with your thoughts and then moves into the body, it's a good idea to seek solutions that start with your thoughts.

Treatment:

Mindfulness is an excellent treatment for anxiety because mindfulness involves becoming aware of your thoughts. By doing this, you can identify when you're having fearful thoughts and then carefully replace them with better thoughts. This is a deep topic that you can learn much more about in our stroke recovery book *Healing & Happiness After Stroke*. It offers practical ways to manage your anxiety and find emotional healing after stroke.

3. Emotional Lability/Pseudobulbar Effect/Uncontrollable Emotions

Emotional lability is caused by damage to the emotion center of the brain after stroke.

It can trigger emotional outbursts like crying, laughing, anger, or sadness. Typically, these emotions are triggered by something irrelevant to the emotion. For example, a stroke survivor with emotional lability may find themselves laughing at a boring situation or crying because of something funny.

Emotional lability is very unpredictable, which can make it tricky to cope with. But there are still ways to cope!

Treatment:

The conventional treatment for emotional lability is medication. If emotional lability is interfering with your life and preventing you from pursuing recovery, then talk with your doctor about your medical options.

There is a natural way to treat emotional lability, though. Since emotional lability is caused by damage in the area of the brain that controls emotion, then you can treat emotional lability naturally by rewiring your emotion center of the brain. And you can do this by (drum roll) practicing *feeling your emotions on purpose*.

A great time to practice your emotions is during regular, routine activities that trigger a specific emotion. For example, playing with your pet should make you happy; watching a comedy skit should make you laugh; watching a sad movie should make you sad. During these activities, try to *feel your emotions on purpose*.

You can achieve this by telling yourself, “I feel happy right now.” Or, “I feel sad watching this.” As long as you’re making the connection in your brain between your emotion and the activity, then you will start to rewire your brain.

And by linking your brain to your emotions like this, you can start to slowly regain control of your emotions. *Anything is possible through the power of neuroplasticity and repetitive practice.*

How Long Will My Recovery Take?

And that wraps up our overview of the most common emotional stroke side effects. But you may still find yourself asking, how long will all this physical, mental, and emotional healing take?

It’s a deep topic, so let’s discuss it in detail in part 5.