

Stroke  
Association

# When you have a **stroke**

A short guide





## We're here for you

If you need more help and information, contact our Stroke Helpline on **0303 3033 100**, email **helpline@stroke.org.uk**, or visit **stroke.org.uk**.

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## Read this with someone

Having a stroke can make it harder to understand things. Reading and talking about this guide with someone else can help you understand.



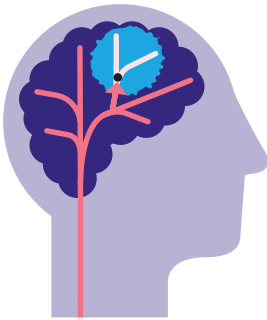
## Driving

By law, you must not drive for one calendar month after a stroke. Find out what you need to do [stroke.org.uk/driving](https://stroke.org.uk/driving).

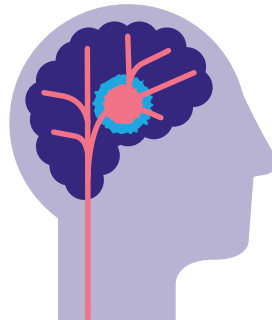
# Understand your stroke

When a stroke happens, part of the brain loses its blood supply. This damages the brain.

## There are two main types of stroke



**1. Ischaemic:**  
due to a blocked blood vessel in the brain.



**2. Haemorrhagic:**  
due to bleeding in or around the brain.

Ischaemic stroke is often referred to as a clot.  
Haemorrhagic stroke is often called a bleed.

### In hospital after a stroke

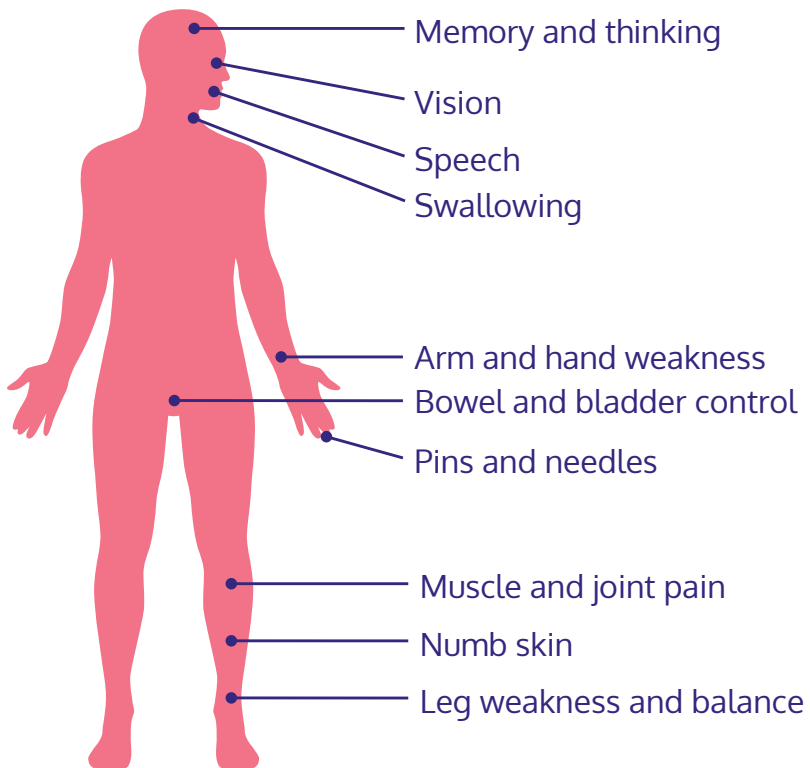
- You have brain scans, tests and treatments.
- You might feel tired and unwell.
- You might feel shocked and upset.
- Feeling confused is normal with a stroke.

## The effects of a stroke depend on two things

1. Where the stroke is in your brain.
2. How much the stroke has damaged your brain.

Every stroke is different. Your stroke and your recovery are unique to you.

This picture shows some of the main effects of stroke.



## A stroke can affect how you think and feel

Having a stroke often causes memory problems. You might have trouble concentrating. It can also make you feel very emotional.



The hidden effects of a stroke can be hard for you and others to understand. Try talking to your friends and family about them if you can.

## Physical effects of a stroke

A stroke can affect any part of your body, and it can be mild or severe. Some people have no physical effects, and others have several. Some common effects include:

### Weakness or paralysis down one side of your body

- Weak leg muscles: it may be hard to balance and walk.
- Weakness in your arm and hand: it may be difficult to do things like writing, using a knife and fork, and getting dressed.

### Swallowing problems

Many people can't swallow properly after a stroke. You might need soft food, or be fed through a tube for a time.

### Vision problems

Many people have vision problems after a stroke. This includes being sensitive to light, and having missing areas in your vision.

## The hidden effects of stroke

After a stroke, you might have some 'hidden' effects:

- Fatigue: tiredness that does not get better with rest.
- Feeling anxious or low is common after a stroke.
- Changes to your behaviour, such as being more irritable or impulsive, or losing interest in things.
- Emotionalism: finding it hard to control your emotions.



Read about more effects of stroke online at [stroke.org.uk/effects-of-stroke](https://stroke.org.uk/effects-of-stroke).

# Communicating after a stroke

Many people have trouble communicating after a stroke. This can happen for different reasons:

1. Damage to the language areas of your brain can cause aphasia. People with aphasia can have a range of problems using language. They can find it hard to speak and understand speech, read, write and use numbers. Having aphasia does not mean that you are less intelligent, you simply have a problem using language.
2. Speech can be slurred due to weak muscles in your face.
3. Problems with your memory and concentration can make it hard to communicate.





# Recovering after a stroke

Any stroke, big or small, can have a major effect on your life. Many people make a good recovery, but not everyone can go back to how they were before a stroke. Some people will have a disability. But with the right support, you can rebuild your life.

The biggest improvements usually happen in the first few months. But recovery can carry on for years.

## **Many problems improve quickly**

Many problems get better in a few days or weeks after a stroke. Things like bladder control, speaking, swallowing and walking often improve soon after a stroke.

## **People who help you after a stroke**

Therapists, doctors and nurses give treatments and therapy to help your recovery. Friends and family can also support you.

## **Get help with the effects of stroke**

If you are still in hospital, speak to your doctor, nurse or therapist. If you have left hospital, ask your GP for help.

## Rehabilitation

Your brain can 'rewire' itself by creating new connections between healthy areas. This process is called neuroplasticity.

Rehabilitation therapy helps to develop the new connections in your brain. With expert support, and plenty of hard work and practise, it may be possible to relearn skills like walking and speaking.

### How rehabilitation works

Therapy starts soon after your stroke. A therapist assesses you, and together you agree on the goals you want to achieve. The therapist makes an individual plan, with activities and advice to help you reach your goals.

- If you have muscle weakness or paralysis down one side, therapy aims to help you to start moving and improve your balance.
- Therapy can also improve skills like speaking and writing.
- If you have trouble using your arms and hands, therapy might help you learn new ways of doing everyday activities like dressing and cooking.



Rehabilitation starts with help from therapists, but continues at home. Practising activities helps you improve. You can do activities on your own, or with help and encouragement from family and friends.



**Tip: give it time**

Take it one day at a time. Don't panic if things don't get better right away.

## Types of therapist

### Physiotherapist

Helps with strength, mobility, balance and stamina.

### Occupational therapist

Helps you regain independence by relearning skills for everyday living. They can advise you on adapting your home, and aids to help you with activities like cooking.

### Speech and language therapist (SLT)

Helps you improve speech, and treats swallowing and eating difficulties. Also helps with reading and writing.

### Dietitian

Supports people with swallowing difficulties to eat and drink safely, and advises on healthy eating.

### Psychologist

Helps people with memory and thinking difficulties, and emotional problems like depression.



#### Tip: ask questions

At first it can be hard to understand what a stroke means. Medical staff and therapists will be happy to answer your questions.

# Spotting the signs of a stroke

It's vital to know the warning signs of another stroke. Using the FAST test is the best way to do this.

## FAST test

**F**

### Face

Can the person smile?  
Has their face fallen on one side?



**A**

### Arms

Can the person raise both arms  
and keep them there?



**S**

### Speech problems

Can the person speak clearly  
and understand what you say?  
Is their speech slurred?



**T**

### Time

If you see any of these three  
signs, it's time to call **999**.



These are the main signs of a stroke. But there are some others to look out for:

- Sudden weakness or numbness on one side, including legs, hands or feet.
- Difficulty finding words or speaking in clear sentences.
- Sudden blurred vision or loss of sight in one or both eyes.
- Sudden memory loss or confusion, and dizziness or a sudden fall.
- A sudden, severe headache.

If you spot any of these signs, call **999** straight away.



Stroke can happen to anyone, at any age. Every second counts. If you spot any of these signs of a stroke, don't wait. Call **999** straight away.





# Reduce the risk of another stroke

When you have a stroke, you are checked for any health conditions that can lead to a stroke. These include:

- High blood pressure.
- Atrial fibrillation (irregular heartbeat).
- Diabetes.
- High cholesterol.

One of the best ways to reduce your risk of a stroke is to follow any treatment you need for these conditions.

You will also get advice about other ways of reducing your risk. This might include being more active, eating healthy food, or stopping smoking.

Having another stroke can be a big worry for you, your friends and family. Your GP or stroke nurse can give you individual advice about your health conditions, and ideas for healthy lifestyle activities.



For more ideas, read 'Getting active after a stroke' online, or order a print copy at [stroke.org.uk/getting-active](https://stroke.org.uk/getting-active).



# You are not alone

Many stroke survivors say they feel isolated at first, and it can be hard to explain to other people what you are feeling. The shock of a stroke can change people's lives.

After leaving hospital, you should have support from medical professionals such as nurses and therapists on the community stroke team. If you feel that you need more support, call our Helpline or contact your GP.

## Talk to others

It can help to talk to family and friends. Share your feelings, and help other people understand what you are going through.

Many people find it helpful to meet other stroke survivors. Our online tool **mystrokeguide.com** has a free online forum for stroke survivors and carers.

## Stroke groups

There is a network of stroke groups in the UK. Find your local group at **stroke.org.uk/support**, or call our Helpline.

# Where to get help and information

## From the Stroke Association

### Helpline

Our Helpline offers information and support for anyone affected by a stroke. This includes friends and carers.

Call us on **0303 3033 100**, from a textphone:  
**18001 0303 3033 100**.

Or email: [helpline@stroke.org.uk](mailto:helpline@stroke.org.uk).

### Read our information

Get detailed information about stroke online at **stroke.org.uk**, or call the Helpline to ask for printed copies.

### My Stroke Guide

The Stroke Association's online tool My Stroke Guide gives you free access to trusted advice, information and support 24/7. My Stroke Guide connects you to our online community, to find out how others manage their recovery.

Log on to [mystrokeguide.com](http://mystrokeguide.com) today.

## Help with health and everyday living

### Reducing your stroke risk

For individual advice on reducing your risk of a stroke, see your GP, specialist stroke nurse or pharmacist.

### Help with the effects of stroke

If you need help with emotional or physical problems after a stroke, see your GP.

### Support needs

For information on accommodation and care, contact your local council adult social services department. If you have trouble getting the support you need, call our Helpline.

### Legal and money advice

For free, confidential advice about money, legal and employment issues, contact Citizens Advice [citizensadvice.org.uk](http://citizensadvice.org.uk).

Visit [stroke.org.uk/financial-support](http://stroke.org.uk/financial-support) to find out more about the financial support available.



### **Joining a research study**

You may be eligible to take part in a research study. Research helps us improve stroke diagnosis and care. If you are asked to be in a study, you can discuss any questions with the researchers, and you can also talk to your GP.

## About our information

We want to provide the best information for people affected by stroke. That's why we ask stroke survivors and their families, as well as medical experts, to help us put our publications together.



### How did we do?

To tell us what you think of this guide, or to request a list of the sources we used to create it, email us at [feedback@stroke.org.uk](mailto:feedback@stroke.org.uk).



### Accessible formats

Visit our website if you need this information in audio, large print or braille.



### Always get individual advice

This guide contains general information about stroke. But if you have a problem, you should get individual advice from a professional such as a GP or pharmacist. Our Helpline can also help you find support. We work very hard to give you the latest facts, but some things change. We don't control the information provided by other organisations or websites.

**When stroke strikes, part of your brain shuts down.** And so does a part of you. But the brain can adapt. Our specialist support, research and campaigning are only possible with the courage and determination of the stroke community. With more donations and support from you, we can rebuild even more lives.

Donate or find out more at [stroke.org.uk](https://stroke.org.uk)

## Contact us

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We're here for you. Contact us for expert information and support by phone, email and online.

Stroke Helpline: **0303 3033 100**

From a textphone: **18001 0303 3033 100**

Email: [helpline@stroke.org.uk](mailto:helpline@stroke.org.uk)

Website: [stroke.org.uk](https://stroke.org.uk)

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Rebuilding lives after stroke



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**Patient information awards**  
Highly commended

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