



STROKE SA

**STROKE  
FACT  
SHEET**

**3**

# CARING FOR SOMEONE WHO HAS HAD A STROKE

Different people react differently to the stresses of being a carer. It can depend on numerous factors such as:

1. Your relationship with the person prior to them having a stroke.
2. Your life style prior to experiencing stroke.
3. Your own health and needs.
4. The level of support that you have from others.

## **THE STRAIN OF CARING**

Caring for someone who has had a stroke can be extremely hard work. There is:

1. **PHYSICAL STRAIN** - Lifting, physically helping the person to perform specific tasks, performing manual tasks that the person you are caring for was previously carrying out.
2. **MENTAL STRAIN** - Worried that you are not doing enough, difficulty finding the time for rest breaks, difficulty finding the time to achieve everything that you need to do during the day, emotional strain (dealing with loss - ie loss of previously anticipated life plan, loss of previous knowledge of the person, loss of good health due to stress).
3. **SOCIAL STRAIN** - Ignoring or placing limitations on other aspects of your life including work, friends, family and your leisure time. (1)

## **CARING FOR YOURSELF**

To effectively carry out your role as a carer it is important to maintain your own health. The list below provides some guidelines that will help you to care for yourself.

1. Be able to recognise signs of stress.
2. Seek and accept help from others.
3. Ensure that you get time off.
4. Take regular holidays.
5. Maintain your contact with others. (1,2)

## **RECOGNISING SIGNS OF STRESS**

It is important to be able to recognise the early signs of stress. If stress is allowed to build up over time it can have a large detrimental effect on health and well being.

### **The physical signs of stress include:**

1. Eating, drinking (alcohol), or smoking too much.
2. Fatigue.
3. Being unnaturally hyper-active.
4. Knot in the stomach, tightness in the chest, clenching teeth.
5. Difficulty breathing.
6. Bad dreams or nightmares.
7. Excessive sweating.
8. Aching joints. (2)
9. Difficulty getting to sleep or frequently waking up during the night.
10. Being unable to fight off illness.

**Non physical symptoms of stress include:**

1. Being unusually forgetful.
2. Fear of something that had never frightened you in the past.
3. Wanting to withdraw from people you normally like to spend time with.
4. Having outbursts of anger.
5. Feeling deeply depressed. (2)

**THE POINTS THAT FOLLOW MAY HELP TO REDUCE STRESS -  
*HELP FROM OTHERS***

Your every day routine will be easier to cope with if you accept help offered by others and ask for extra help if needed. Assistance may be gained from family, friends and neighbours. It is best to give people jobs that you know they enjoy and are capable of carrying out. (1)

There are also services within the community that can provide help free of charge or at a small cost. This can include help with cooking meals, cleaning, for nursing tasks etc. (Refer to the Stroke Support Directory, available from Stroke SA for more information).

***GETTING A BREAK***

It is important to organise a regular system of relief. You should try to have at least 1 day or 2 half days a week free where you have time out to do some of the things that you enjoy. Planning holidays is also important. There are voluntary support groups within the community that can provide assistance and advantage should be taken of various respite agencies. Organising the person that you are caring for to go on visits to day centers or stroke groups is another option. (1) You can also make use of the respite services (refer to the Stroke Support directory, available from Stroke SA for further information).

***MAINTAINING CONTACT WITH OTHERS***

Continue to invite people to your home and go visiting.(1) If inviting people to your home it is best to start off with something you feel that you can cope with, for example afternoon tea. Once you feel more confident you can start to organise larger events such as inviting people over for dinner and gradually working back into as normal a social life as possible.

Do not give up all of your hobbies and interests. (1) Council directories (available from your local council) can provide information as to what type of social and recreational activities are available within your local area.

***FURTHER CONTACTS***

It is important to remember that you can only care for a person successfully if you are also caring for yourself. Furthermore it is often useful to talk about your frustrations, grief and feelings of anger with others (1) (eg health professionals, family, friends, support groups and the person that you are caring for). If and when possible ongoing open discussion with the person you are caring for is also very important. Taking the opportunity to share frustration, grief, anger but also the joys of achievement will often build a very strong mutually caring relationship between all concerned.

It is important to remember that the person who had the stroke may find the loss of previous roles (eg the 'breadwinner') quite depressing. They may need time to adapt, but also need the freedom to experiment with their independence and to discover new roles and ways of contributing to family and community

It is important that you take the opportunity wherever possible to have open discussion with the person you are caring for regarding their needs and your needs and the needs of others. This may be difficult in the early stages but will hopefully set a base on which all concerned may build working as a team with concern for each other.

Carers Association of SA Inc- can provide information about carers support groups in your local area. Phone 82716288

Stroke Support Directory is available from Stroke SA.

#### **REFERENCES**

Hewer, R.L. & Wade, D.T. (1986). *Stroke a practical guide towards recovery*. London: Martin Dunitz Ltd.

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