



American Stroke Association®

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Post-Stroke Depression

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What is Post-Stroke Depression?

Post-stroke depression, or PSD, is a feeling of hopelessness that interferes with functioning. It's largely unrecognized, under-diagnosed and under-treated.

- About 30% of stroke survivors develop depression.
- Post-stroke depression can occur right away, or months or even years later.
- Depression can result from a biochemical change in the brain due to stroke or an emotional reaction to one.





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Consequences of Post-Stroke Depression

Depression is a common and serious complication after a stroke.

It's associated with:

- Higher death rate
- Poorer recovery
- Problems with thinking, such as inability to remember, learn new things or concentrate
- Poor functional outcomes
- Lower quality of life





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Symptoms of Post-Stroke Depression

- Depressed mood, called anhedonia
- Persistent sad, anxious or empty feelings
- Significant fatigue/lack of energy
- Lack of motivation
- Social withdrawal
- Problems concentrating/remembering details
- Difficulty finding enjoyment in anything
- Sleep disturbances
- Irritability
- Increase or decrease in appetite and eating patterns
- Feelings of helplessness, hopelessness and/or worthlessness
- Aches, pains and digestive problems that don't ease with treatment
- Suicidal thoughts



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Factors Associated with Increased Risk for Post-Stroke Depression

- History of depression
- Physical disability
- Stroke severity
- Cognitive impairment
- Previous stroke
- A family history of psychiatric conditions
- Being a woman
- Lack of family and social support after stroke
- Anxiety after stroke





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How is Depression Different from Pseudobulbar Affect?

Pseudobulbar affect (PBA) is a condition characterized by episodes of sudden uncontrollable and inappropriate laughing or crying. It typically occurs in people with certain neurological conditions or injuries that may affect the way the brain controls emotion.

It often goes undiagnosed or is mistaken for mood disorders such as depression. Once diagnosed, PBA can be managed with medication.





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How is Post-Stroke Depression Diagnosed?

- Diagnosing post-stroke depression can be challenging because stroke symptoms can mask signs of depression.
- Your health care professional should evaluate you for depression during a follow-up visit. Often, this is done through a variety of patient questionnaire screening tools.
- Be open and honest and explain what you are experiencing. Include your caregiver or family member in these conversations, as it may be difficult for you to easily identify signs of depression.





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Coping Techniques

Stroke survivors have a tendency to not consider their mood disorder symptoms as part of depression. Instead, they deny or construe them as the stroke sequel.

Talk to your health care professional openly and honestly if you can't explain feelings and thoughts after your stroke.





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Coping Techniques

Social support is key.

Several studies show that depression goes hand in hand with lower levels of support. Look to your family, friends, or online stroke communities for support.





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Coping Techniques

Find a local stroke support group.

Connect with other stroke survivors and share your story. Learn about resources and services in your community to help make your post-stroke journey easier.





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Coping Techniques

Physical activity can help alleviate depression.





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Coping Techniques

Keep a journal.

Write down your thoughts and feelings for 20 minutes a day.





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Post-Stroke Depression Treatment

Because of the complexity of post-stroke depression several treatments should be tried to determine patient-specific usefulness.



Antidepressants:

These medications should be closely monitored for effectiveness. Antidepressants may help survivors enjoy life again.



Therapy:

Sessions with a qualified mental health professional dealing with mood disorders may be useful. Patient education, counseling and social support may all be added as components of a treatment plan.



Exercise program:

If you have been cleared to exercise, a structured exercise program complementary to other treatment might also help treat your post-stroke depression.



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Talking to Your Health Care Professional

- Remember, if you have symptoms of depression, talk to your health care professional.
- Be sure to be open and honest and explain what you're experiencing.
- Make it clear that what you're experiencing started after your stroke.





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Group Discussion



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What are some of the symptoms that may suggest someone is experiencing post-stroke depression?





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In your own words, how would you describe post-stroke depression and its impact?





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What's important for you to convey to your health care professional to accurately evaluate and diagnose post-stroke depression?





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What suggested techniques will you try to help manage your post-stroke depression?





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For more resources on post-stroke
depression and life after stroke, visit
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