STROKE: On the Road to Recovery

The aftermath of a stroke can be debilitating and depressing. If you or someone you love has suffered from a stroke, you may be wondering if there’s a light at the end of the tunnel. Take heart: About 35 percent of stroke patients recover completely or with only minor impairments, reports the National Stroke Association. With the right treatment, care and lifestyle changes, even those with moderate to severe impairment can regain some level of functioning or adapt to physical limitations.

The Effects of Stroke

A stroke happens when the blood flow to the brain becomes blocked off, causing brain cells to die within minutes. When brain cells die or become damaged, it can cause a variety of serious problems. The location where a stroke occurs in the brain determines how it affects the body and mind, according to the American Stroke Association.

- Right brain damage can result in paralysis or weakness on the left side of the body, vision problems, memory loss and an inquisitive behavioral style.
- Left brain damage can cause paralysis or weakness on the right side of the body, speech and language problems, memory loss and a cautious behavioral style.
- Brain stem damage can affect both sides of the body. A severe stroke in this region could leave someone in a “locked in” state where they are unable to move any part of the body except the eyes.
- Stroke also can impact ongoing mental health. Feelings of anger, anxiety, sadness, fear and hopelessness are common after experiencing a stroke.

Continued on page 2

Track Behavior to Meet Health Goals

When it comes to weight, fitness or health, many of us focus on outcomes. “I want to lose 15 lbs.” “I want to walk a 5K.” “I want to lower my blood sugar.” These are great goals, but how will you get there?

To reach desired outcomes, we have to focus on behavior. Once you’ve set goals, the best way to stick with them is to keep track of your progress. You can track your activities and results with something as simple as a notebook, or you can use the H2U Health Trackers at H2U.com.

Remember, good habits take time to develop. H2U Health Trackers help set you up for success by making it easy to track both behavior goals and outcome goals. Look for the trackers under the Resources tab at H2U.com.

H2U Benefit

More

Sing a Little Song

Whether you’ve got the pipes of an opera singer or can’t carry a tune in a bucket, singing is good for your health. Not only does it fill your body with oxygen, but it can help lower stress, improve cognitive skills and potentially battle dementia.

Singing also can help you connect with others. Belting out your favorite songs isn’t an activity you have to limit to your shower or car. Instead, try some of these ways to get in harmony with others.

> Join a community or church choral group.
> Grab a mic at a karaoke bar.
> Host a karaoke party with your friends.
> Teach songs to your grandkids (or have them teach you the new Adele song).
> Go to a movie sing-a-long.
> Play music at home and sing with family or friends.
> Watch YouTube videos of favorite singers and join their performance.
> Whistle (or warble) while you work.
The 411 on Stroke Rehabilitation

The goal of stroke rehabilitation is for survivors to regain the highest level of independence possible. Success depends on the amount of brain damage sustained, one’s support system and the timing of treatment—the earlier therapy begins, the more function the patient is likely to regain. When possible, rehab should start within 24–48 hours after a stroke.

Though the central nervous system is adaptive, it often takes many months and a lot of perseverance to teach the brain how to compensate for loss of physical abilities or to overcome communication difficulties. For example, individuals may need to learn how to bathe and dress with one hand or relearn how to speak.

Depending on the individual’s needs, a combination of the following therapies may be recommended.

✱ Physical therapy: Strengthening motor skills; mobility training (may include walking aids); forced-use therapy, which involves restraining a patient’s unaffected limb so they are forced to use the affected limb to do tasks; and range-of-motion therapy.

✱ Technology assistance: Electronic stimulation of weak muscles; robotics to help with repetitive motions; wireless activity monitors; virtual reality programs to simulate real-time environments; or transcranial magnetic stimulation (TMS) to help improve motor skills.

✱ Cognitive and emotional care: Speech and communication therapy; psychological evaluation; counseling and treatment for depression.

Researchers are also conducting clinical trials to investigate the effectiveness of therapies like stem cell treatments. Alternative treatments like massage, herbal therapy and acupuncture are also under study.

Since the effects of a stroke vary depending on its severity and location in the brain, a team of specialists will work with patients to map out a road to recovery. Family caregivers also play an important role in recovery, since loved ones may need help with dressing, eating, communicating, taking medication and doing physical therapy. If you are a caregiver, don’t hesitate to ask family and friends to help with errands, prepare meals or just stop by for a brief visit so you can take a breather.

You can find more information on living well after a stroke at H2U.com. In the search box on the home page, type “Lifestyle Changes to Manage Stroke.”

Fight Vein Troubles

Summer fashions can make you feel a little embarrassed about the appearance of the veins in your legs. Varicose veins and spider veins are quite common, though, and usually are not a sign of serious health problems. The U.S. Office on Women’s Health (OWH) says more than half of women have some type of vein problem.

Varicose veins, which are caused by weak or damaged valves in the veins, look blue, red or flesh-colored. They are larger than normal veins and may appear twisted or bulge above the skin’s surface. They’re most often found on thighs, backs of calves and the inside of the leg. Age, family history and working on your feet can contribute to varicose veins.

Spider veins are smaller than varicose veins and are closer to the surface of the skin. They’re almost always red or blue-colored and typically look like spider webs. Spider veins are caused by backups of blood in the veins, hormone changes, sun exposure and injuries.

So how can you prevent unsightly veins? Well, you can’t prevent all varicose and spider veins. But you can reduce your chances of getting new ones. For starters, wear sunscreen to prevent spider veins, especially on the face. Avoid standing or sitting for long periods at a time. Don’t cross your legs, but do prop up your feet when sitting. Exercising helps improve blood flow and can also help you shed excess pounds. Avoid wearing tight clothing, especially around the waist, upper thighs and legs.

And ladies? Here’s a reason to kick off those high heels for good: Lower-heeled shoes contract calf muscles and increase blood flow in your legs.
Watch Out for Not-So-Healthy Health Foods

You’re about to bite into a turkey burger with a side of sweet potato fries, fruit salad and a glass of almond milk. For dessert, you’re having organic chocolate chip cookies. You’ve made a healthy choice, right?

Maybe not. Some foods have an erroneous “health halo,” which happens when naturally nutritious foods are deemed healthy no matter how they’re prepared or what they’re paired with.

While the turkey-burger meal is better than a bacon cheeseburger, French fries and milkshake, you’re probably eating more sodium, fat and carbs than you expected.

Turkey burger: Turkey is a lean meat, but ground versions may be packed with sodium, which can raise blood pressure and increase your risk for cardiovascular disease. Plus, sandwiching that patty in a buttery bun slathered with mayo and topped with cheese negates its healthier attributes.

Sweet potato fries: Sweet potatoes are a great source of vitamins, dietary fiber and potassium, but deep-frying anything ramps up the fat content.

Fruit salad: You can’t go wrong with fruit—unless you drown it in sugary dressings or high-calorie dips.

Organic chocolate chip cookies: They may have been produced without pesticides, dyes and chemical fertilizers, but these cookies most likely still have loads of sugar, fat and refined carbs.

Almond milk: This dairy alternative is high in vitamin E and is low in saturated fats, but most almond milk also contains sweeteners and artificial additives.

So, what should you do? Consider how food is prepared. Anything deep fried should ring warning bells. Also, look at the ingredients list. Don’t assume labels like “local,” “gluten-free” and “grass-fed” mean the food is healthy. Check for hidden sugar, fat, cholesterol, sodium and additives. Finally, beware of toppings and condiments. Organic ketchup is still loaded with sugar.

Why Do I Feel ... ?

Dealing With Unpredictable Emotions After a Stroke

Have you ever had a case of the church giggles or barked at someone for a minor imposition? These hard-to-control emotions are fleeting and rare for most of us. For some stroke patients, however, uncontrollable and unpredictable emotions become a part of daily life.

Stroke can damage the part of the brain that regulates emotions, which can result in laughing or crying in socially inappropriate moments. Stroke may also cause confusion, memory problems or depression, which can impact one’s feelings. Plus, the stress and anxiety of recovery can be emotionally taxing for both patients and caregivers.

If you are caring for someone who struggles with unpredictable emotions, consider asking a mental health specialist for help. Counseling or medication can reduce symptoms, and these tips may help manage emotions.

Join a support group. Encourage your loved one to join a support group with people who understand what they’re feeling. If you’re a full-time caregiver, a support group may be helpful for you, too!

Exercise. Not only does physical activity improve strength, balance and brain health, staying fit can also enhance self-confidence and reduce depression and anxiety, according to the American Stroke Association (ASA). Exercising can reduce stress for caregivers, too.

Think positively. Nix phrases like “You can’t” and “You won’t” from your vocabulary, recommends the ASA. Instead, say, “You can” and “You will.” Helping stroke patients maintain a positive outlook for the future may quicken recovery.
Edamame Salad

Cool down this summer with a protein-packed southwestern edamame salad tossed with cherry tomatoes, corn and cilantro.

**Ingredients**
- 1 lb. package frozen edamame, pre-shelled
- ¾ cup canned black beans, drained and rinsed
- 1 cup frozen corn
- 4 green onions, sliced
- ½ cup fresh cilantro, chopped
- 1 cup cherry tomatoes, halved
- 1 garlic clove, minced
- 2 Tbsp. lime juice
- ¼ cup olive oil
- ¼ tsp. salt
- ¼ tsp. pepper

**Directions:** Bring a large pot of water to a boil. Add edamame and cook for 2–3 minutes. Add frozen corn and cook for another 2 minutes. Drain water and set aside to cool. In a large bowl, mix together black beans, green onions, cilantro and tomatoes. In a small bowl, whisk together garlic, olive oil, lime juice, salt and pepper, then pour over the black bean mixture. Add cooled edamame and corn and toss. Place in fridge until cool. Serves 6.

**Nutritional information (per serving):**
- Calories 96; Total fat 13 g; Protein 14.5 g; Sodium 111 mg; Fiber 7 g; Sugars 4 g; Carbs 30 g

---

**Why Alcohol Affects Blood Sugar**

Drinking a glass or two of wine at dinner or grabbing a beer while watching the game may seem harmless, but if you suffer from diabetes, you could be playing havoc with your blood sugar.

When you drink alcohol, your body has nowhere to store it. And since the liver sees alcohol as a toxin, it begins metabolizing it immediately.

**What does that have to do with blood sugar levels?**

The liver is responsible for storing and producing blood sugar. When it's busy metabolizing alcohol, the liver essentially pushes the pause button on regulating blood sugar.

---

**MONTHLY CHALLENGE:**

**Eat More Flavonoids!**

Many of us gain weight as we age, but now a large, long-term study published in the journal *BMJ* suggests that eating a diet rich in flavonoids may keep the pounds from piling on. You're probably thinking, “flavo-whats?” Flavonoids are natural plant compounds that give foods color. They also have antioxidant and anti-inflammatory effects, and some studies show they could help prevent heart disease and cancer.

As a result, blood glucose levels can drop right away or up to 24 hours after drinking. This can lead to hypoglycemia. Since symptoms of hypoglycemia, like sleepiness, dizziness and disorientation, can mimic drunkenness, people can mistake the signs of very low blood sugar for tipsiness.

Does that make alcohol off-limits?

Actually, most people with diabetes can have a moderate amount of alcohol as long as they don't drink on an empty stomach. The American Diabetes Association recommends that women have no more than one drink per day and men no more than two. Test blood sugar levels before drinking, and right before going to bed. Stay hydrated with a zero-calorie drink like water or seltzer. And be aware of the side effects of mixing alcohol with medications you take.

This month, we challenge you to paint your plate with colorful, good-for-you fruits and veggies. Here are a few easy ways to take in more flavonoids.

- Swap a regular baked potato for a baked sweet potato.
- Mix fresh or frozen berries into plain, unsweetened yogurt. Top with walnuts.
- Spread pesto on sandwiches.
- Use dark, leafy greens in omelets, pasta dishes and, of course, salads.
- Drive past the drive-thru and grab a banana as part of an on-the-go breakfast.
- Scoop up hummus with raw veggies for a midday snack.