



A complete guide to

# Work and stroke

**Stroke**  
Association

**This guide aims to provide you with all the information you need to help you think about working after a stroke. Going back to work can be a big change, and planning ahead can help you through the process. We have tips on planning for your return and getting the support you need at work.**

There is also information on changing career, retirement, and volunteering. We look at your rights at work if you have an illness or disability. We also explain the types of financial and practical support available.

## **Work and coronavirus (COVID-19)**

If you are a stroke survivor, you need to take extra care to avoid catching COVID-19. Speak to your employer to find out how they can support you to stay safe in the workplace. There's online government guidance for safe workplaces at [gov.uk/guidance/working-safely-during-coronavirus-covid-19](https://gov.uk/guidance/working-safely-during-coronavirus-covid-19).

If you are eligible for a vaccine, your GP will contact you. Information about the pandemic changes frequently, so check the online information about your local area. For more information and advice on working during the pandemic, you can contact Acas (England, Wales and Scotland) or the Labour Relations Agency (LRA) (Northern Ireland).

## **Who is this guide for?**

- Anyone who has had a stroke and is thinking about returning to work.
- Anyone who has a disability or health problem after a stroke, and needs tips on managing at work.
- Anyone changing jobs or careers after a stroke.

**"I wish I had had this guide straight after my stroke. My employer wasn't all that supportive and I felt so alone. Having a guide like this would have made me feel like I had options and given me the confidence to ask for support."**

**Liza-Jane, stroke survivor**

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# Section 1: While you are off work after a stroke

## Will I be able to go back to work?

With the right care, support and advice many people do return to work. Whether you are able to return to work and how long it takes will depend on the effects of your stroke, the type of care and support you received, what work you were doing before and the amount of support your employer can give you.

## How long will I be off work?

Every stroke is different, and every recovery is different. Someone who had a small stroke could return to work within a few weeks, while others may return after months or a couple of years. There's no set pattern.

Talk to your doctors, nurses, and therapists about what you can expect. The most important thing is to take things as they come and follow any treatment or rehabilitation therapy you have been given.

Stroke affects people in many different ways and the effects of a stroke may change over time. You should contact your GP if you experience new problems after a stroke.

## Timing

It's helpful not to rush back to work too quickly following a stroke. For many, financial or career pressures mean they want to go back full time as soon as possible. However, it's important to do so only when you feel well enough, have received support and have a plan in place with your employer for your return.

You may get advice from professionals, your employer and your family who might all have differing opinions about your return to work after stroke.

Remember, you are the expert in your own needs so try to keep control over decisions about returning to work.

Many people find that work helps with their recovery. It can give a sense of purpose and focus to your day, provided you can cope with the demands of the job

You might want to try doing some voluntary work to see if work for you at this stage of your recovery. It can help you to regain some of your confidence and independence.

## What should I tell my employer?

If possible, contact your employer yourself. Tell them that you have had a stroke, that you are taking part in rehabilitation, and that you will contact them again. Ideally, you should specify when you will next be in touch to discuss your return. If you need advice, your GP or occupational therapist can help you come up with a time frame.

Ask your employer for a copy of their policy on returning to work after sick leave. It is also useful to ask for a copy of the job description for your current role, or any alternative roles that you are considering.

Make sure you keep in touch with your employer. This should help you feel less isolated and ease your worries about returning to work. Talk through your thoughts, concerns and options with someone you trust and who will support you in making your decision to return.

Many employers will be supportive of your return to work. Some employers may lack the knowledge or experience for supporting people back to work after a stroke.

Our guide, 'Complete guide to stroke for employers' could be helpful for managers and HR staff to read.

Occasionally an employer can show a lack of understanding. Section 3 of this guide has information about your rights at work, and how to get help if you have difficulties.

## Tips for planning your return to work

Each time you speak to your employer, only give them the facts they need.

Helpful information to give your employer could be:

- The date of your stroke.
- Your likely date of discharge from hospital.
- A date that you'll be back in touch with them to discuss how you are recovering.

It may be helpful to talk through what you intend to say to your employer with a friend, family member, or healthcare professional first.

**"You have to be quite proactive sometimes."**

**Tom, stroke survivor**

### Dealing with the effects of the stroke while you are preparing to return to work

The effects of a stroke can include:

- **Physical problems:** for example, difficulty moving around or using your arms or legs.
- **Cognitive problems:** these can include problems with thinking, memory and concentration.
- **Aphasia:** difficulty speaking or understanding language, which can also affect reading and writing.
- **Fatigue:** extreme tiredness which doesn't get better with rest.
- **Emotional changes:** for example, feeling tearful or anxious.
- **Behaviour changes:** this can include increased irritability or becoming shy due to lack of confidence. Changes to behaviour may be particularly difficult for colleagues to adjust to. If you feel able to talk about it, you could explain that this is an effect of the stroke and that you are still the same person. We have information about managing behaviour changes on [stroke.org.uk](https://www.stroke.org.uk) which you can read and share with your employer or colleagues.

Some effects of stroke aren't obvious to others, such as fatigue or cognitive problems. We call these 'hidden' effects, but they can have a big impact on you. Sometimes people aren't aware of these problems until they are back at work.

The Stroke Association offers advice and information on the effects of stroke. For more information turn to Section 5: 'Where to get help and information.'

### Emotional and behaviour changes

A stroke is sudden and shocking, and affects every part of your life. It's a lot to deal with, and everyone reacts differently. Sometimes, when things seem difficult, anxiety and frustration can make people feel that they're unable to cope. Worry and loss of confidence can stop people from returning to work.

Tips for managing emotional changes at work:

- Frequent reviews will help both you and your employer. This will allow you both to identify issues early on and put in place any changes that are needed.
- Ask if your organisation can offer any counselling or emotional support.
- Ask your GP about emotional support and counselling, or find out about services you can refer yourself to. Our Stroke Helpline can tell you more.

### Try to get all the therapy and support you need

Following a stroke you may have support from the following health professionals:

- Occupational therapist.
- Speech and language therapist.
- Physiotherapist.
- Neuropsychologist.
- Vocational rehabilitation. This is often delivered by a specialist occupational therapist.

The help you get will depend on the effects of the stroke and what is available where you live. If you feel you might benefit from a type of therapy but aren't receiving it, contact your GP and ask for a referral.

### Financial support

Whether you plan to return to work or not, you should try to find out what financial support you may be entitled to. Depending on your circumstances, you may be able to claim benefits such as Universal Credit, which includes payments for people out of work, on a low income, or with an illness or disability. Personal Independence Payment (PIP) is designed to help meet some of the extra costs of long-term ill-health or disability. It is not means-tested, so you can claim it while you are working. Other financial help is available, including council tax discounts and grants.

Our guide 'Benefits and financial assistance' gives details of the financial help available. You can also contact your local Citizens Advice for individual advice.

Remember that there is no embarrassment about claiming benefits. The system is there to support people. Benefits can provide much-needed help, and relieve the burden after stroke. Some people think that benefits are always long-term, but in fact you can claim for a short time while you are recovering and not able to work.

Check with your employer what their policy is on pay during sickness absence. Some organisations offer full pay for a certain period, and others provide Statutory Sick Pay only. Statutory Sick Pay means the basic level of sick pay set by the UK Government. Some employers have insurance schemes to cover sickness. Others offer pay which may reduce over time, depending on your contract and how long you have been an employee.

**Tip:** check any personal insurance policies you may have, which might pay out in the event of a serious illness or loss of earnings.

### 'A complete guide to stroke for employers'

The Stroke Association developed this guidance for employers to help them understand stroke, and support people returning to work following a stroke. It may be helpful to send this guide to your employer. This guide is aimed at employers but there may be information that's useful for stroke survivors and their families as well. You can find the guide on our website [stroke.org.uk](https://stroke.org.uk)

# Section 2: Planning your return to work

Look at going back to work as part of your recovery, rather than the end of your recovery. When you feel you may be ready to return, your employer should work with you to identify what your needs are and what adjustments they can make to help you.

## Think about a phased return

This means a gradual return to work starting off part time and building up to full time hours, to ease back into work gently.

### Travel

Travelling to work can be tiring. You might need support with the journey if you have a physical disability or sight loss. You could try the journey on a non-work day to find out how you manage. You could also ask to work from home some of the time. This could be a 'reasonable adjustment' to help you back to work. See Section 3 for more details about reasonable adjustments.

### Driving

After a stroke, by law you are not allowed to drive for a minimum of one month. After that, depending on the type of stroke you had, your type of disability and the kind of driving licence you hold, you may be able to start driving again. Some people might not be able to drive for a longer period or can lose their licence.

If you used to drive for a living, such as a taxi or a heavy goods vehicle, this will directly affect the work you can do and you might need support with career changing and job seeking. See Section 4 'Volunteering and re-training' later in this guide for ideas on ways to get support and advice.

If you can no longer drive to work, you will need to find alternatives such as working from home, or finding support with travel, such as funding from Access to Work, and free or discounted public transport.

For more information read our guide 'Driving after stroke' or visit [stroke.org.uk/driving](https://stroke.org.uk/driving).

## What do I need to do?

If you have an occupational therapist, they can talk about the work you were doing before your stroke and help you to set realistic goals about returning. They can advise on aids or equipment that you may need.

If you are employed, your employer may have an occupational health service to help staff back to work after illness. You may be able to get access to a specialist vocational rehabilitation professional through your employer or local authority. Speak to your occupational therapist, employer or GP to find out more.

## Support into work if you have a disability or health condition

### Access to Work

Access to Work is a government scheme that provides support in the workplace for people with disabilities. This can include training, equipment and help with travel. See Section 5 for more details.

### Jobcentre Plus individual support

Jobcentre Plus can give help and advice to jobseekers with disabilities and health conditions. A Work Coach gives individual support. They offer Individual Personalised Employment Support (IPES) which is one-to-one support and training to help you into work. Read more at [gov.uk/looking-for-work-if-disabled](https://gov.uk/looking-for-work-if-disabled).

To find a local Jobcentre Plus use the postcode finder on [gov.uk/contact-jobcentre-plus](https://gov.uk/contact-jobcentre-plus).

## Create a return-to-work plan

Returning to work doesn't necessarily mean returning to the same job with the same roles and responsibilities. Even if you can no longer do exactly the same role you did before, there may still be other options to explore. It is important that you think about whether your expectations, skills and stamina match up to the work you want to do.

### What is a return-to-work plan?

This is a plan of action that details someone's support needs following a stroke. Planning for your return and looking at how you will manage the effects of the stroke means you are more likely to stay in work once you return.

### What should it contain?

#### Information about the effects of your stroke.

You don't need to go into lots of medical detail, just a summary of the effects of the stroke. Look at each effect in turn and think about practical steps you can take to address each one.

#### Your tasks

The focus should be on what you can do rather than what you can't. Take a look at your job description with your line manager or human resources officer. Talk about the tasks you can do to start with, and what you feel you could work up to later. Try to think about practical solutions to things that might be difficult for you, such as using equipment or lifting objects. Share your ideas with your employer and try to work together to come up with solutions.

#### Hours of work

You could look at the option of phasing your return. This means starting part time and gradually increasing the number of hours and days you work.

Think about what may work best for you, such as starting later if you need longer to get up and out of the house. You may need longer breaks to help you manage any fatigue.

"I loved my job, I just wanted to get back to it after my stroke. I was also a mum with a family to support. It was hard to adjust to different tasks but easing my way in meant I could cope with the fatigue."

**Nadia, stroke survivor**

### Review

Regular reviews are important to help you see how you are managing your tasks. They also let your employer feed back about how they feel things are going. Think about how this will take place, and agree the time frame and expectations. It could be informal, such as 20 minutes every week with your line manager. Keep some brief notes of each meeting.

### Communicating the stroke to team members

You can help decide how to share information about your stroke with other members of staff. You may choose not to tell them you have had a stroke, just that you will return part time and that your tasks have changed. Another option is an email could be sent to your team from your line manager, with text that has been agreed by you.

### Breaks

Many people will need to have more frequent breaks to help beat fatigue, such as five minutes after every hour worked.

### Time off for appointments

If you need time off for hospital appointments or therapy, bring this up early on and get it agreed with your employer. Some employers have a disability leave policy. This can allow you some time off to go to appointments connected to a disability. It is one of the 'reasonable adjustments' that employers can make to support people with disabilities. See Section 3: 'Your rights at work' for more information about reasonable adjustments.

"My boss made an announcement about my stroke to my team. I felt really disempowered. I wish I could have had the option to tell them myself."

**Alina stroke survivor**

### Take a flexible approach

While you're still recovering from a stroke, new effects can emerge over time. You might find that the support you need changes too. You might need less or more support with certain things. If you are having regular meetings with your manager, you can talk about these changes and how they are affecting your work. You can talk about the things you find difficult, and also let them know if you are feeling ready to take on more or different tasks. This doesn't have to be a formal meeting, it can be over a cup of coffee for half an hour on a Friday to see how the week has gone. It can be a good idea to keep brief notes and summarise any actions. Either you or your manager can make the notes, but make sure you agree them.

### Changes at work

There may have been changes within your organisation while you were away on sick leave. If possible, find out about any changes and their likely effects on you or your position before you go back to work, and talk to your manager if you are concerned.

### Keep a diary

This can be very simple: just a log of any key dates such as when you took on more or different tasks and how they went. This can help you to see how you are progressing and re-build your confidence.

"I often wondered: 'Am I doing ok?' I think having a diary or keeping a note of when I took on additional tasks would have helped me to see the progress I was making."

Henry, stroke survivor

### Talking to colleagues about your stroke

You may be understandably nervous about how colleagues will react to you and the fact you had a stroke.

Remember it's your choice whether you discuss your stroke with colleagues. Sometimes being open and answering questions can help people to understand and be more supportive. Don't be embarrassed or apologise for the effects of your stroke. It can help your colleagues if you explain what a stroke is and how it has affected you, particularly if the effects are 'invisible'.

"I was often told I didn't look like I'd had a stroke. I could tell my team were wondering why I was doing such reduced tasks. I think telling them would have helped them to understand my memory problems and educated them a bit about stroke."

Harvinder, stroke survivor

#### Top tips

- It's important to have open, regular communication with your employer.
- Talk to your employer about having a designated person or "buddy" (not necessarily your line manager) who can support you on a day-to-day basis.
- Some stroke survivors struggle to talk about their difficulties or may not wish to. Remember it can be difficult for your employer to understand 'hidden problems' such as fatigue.
- Try to remain open, and encourage your employer to do the same.
- Ask them to be as supportive and patient as they can.

### Talk to other stroke survivors

Hearing how others overcame barriers to return to work and sharing your experiences with others of a similar age can help you deal with feelings of isolation. It can also give you ideas on what to do if you experience similar problems. Contact the Stroke Helpline to find out about support in your area (see Section 5: 'Where to get help and information').

# Section 3: Your rights at work

This section explains what the law says about disability and work and what you should expect from your employer.

## Disability discrimination

Disability discrimination is against the law. It happens when an employee is treated less favourably due to their disability. This treatment might be direct and obvious, or it may be the result of a policy that appears equal but actually disadvantages some groups. For example, requiring everyone to enter a building via stairs may be indirect discrimination.

Harassment and victimisation can be viewed as types of discrimination, if they are linked to a disability.

## Am I disabled?

The legal definition of a disability in the UK is a physical and or mental impairment that has a substantial and long-term effect on your ability to carry out daily activities. This includes the emotional and cognitive problems you might have after a stroke.

You might not think of yourself as 'disabled' but the law is there to help everyone, including people with hidden disabilities like cognitive and emotional problems. The Equality Act 2010 exists to protect people from all types of discrimination, including disability-based discrimination. It covers many areas of life including work, travel and access to services.

## Disability leave

Some employers have a disability leave policy which allows employees to take paid leave related to their disability, such as for treatment or rehabilitation. This is separate from sickness absence. Disability leave is treated as a reasonable adjustment under the Equality Act 2010, and employers are not obliged to offer it.

Find out how your employer treats absence due to disability. This should be in the staff handbook, or you can ask your line manager or a trade union representative, if you have one.

If disability leave is not available in your workplace, time off for medical appointments may be considered a reasonable adjustment.

## Find out more about your rights

There is useful information about your rights at work on the Equality and Human Rights Commission website:  
[equalityhumanrights.com/disability](https://equalityhumanrights.com/disability)

### Reasonable adjustments

The Equality Act 2010 states that a disability should not stop someone from working or having the same rights and access to opportunities as other people. Employers have a duty to make 'reasonable adjustments' for employees who are disabled.

#### What is a reasonable adjustment?

A reasonable adjustment is a change to the workplace or the way a disabled person does their job in order to allow them to work. This may mean changing work times, transferring to another post or providing specialist equipment to help with certain tasks.

Reasonable adjustments do not have to be expensive or complicated. It's about looking at the barriers a person is experiencing and thinking creatively about removing them.

Employers cannot ask the disabled person to meet the cost of any reasonable adjustments. Employers should allow time to make sure reasonable adjustments can be made before an employee returns to work.

**Tip:** even if your difficulties do not meet the legal definition of a disability, your employer can still make adjustments to help you.

Examples of reasonable adjustments:

- Getting more time to complete tasks.
- Getting help from a support worker.
- Changing the time you start and finish work to avoid rush hour travel.
- Changing tasks to suit what a person can do.
- Changing targets or getting support from other colleagues to meet targets.
- Reducing working hours. You are only legally entitled to be paid for the hours you actually work, but your employer should discuss any changes in pay with you. If your terms of employment and pay have been changed you can seek individual advice from Acas.
- Being allowed to take time off to attend hospital appointments.
- Regular meetings with your manager to see how the tasks set are going.
- Working in a quieter office.
- Having help from an occupational health team.

### Be clear about your support needs

The duty to make reasonable adjustments only applies when someone has a disability as defined in the Equality Act. It does not apply if the employer could not reasonably be expected to know that a person is disabled. It is therefore very important to be honest about the effects of your stroke and keep in contact with your employer. The way your stroke affects your work should be documented in your return-to-work plan and reviewed regularly.

"I was worried my boss wouldn't understand. I didn't want help from anyone. Luckily my workplace was amazing. They were really keen to make sure I had all the support I needed. Once my GP gave me the go-ahead, we came up with a return-to-work plan. I had a phased return, and my line manager and I concentrated on the less complicated tasks first. I've now increased my hours and feel more confident."

Robert, stroke survivor

## Organisations that can help

### Access to Work

Access to Work can help you if your health or disability affects the way you do your job, and your condition is likely to last 12 months or more. It gives you and your employer advice and support with extra costs which may arise because of your needs at work.

See Section 5: 'Where to get help and information', or visit [gov.uk/access-to-work](https://www.gov.uk/access-to-work).

### Fit for Work

This scheme can help you plan for your return to work. It offers information and resources from occupational health specialists. Visit [fitforwork.org](https://www.fitforwork.org).

### If things are not going well

For many stroke survivors, being back in work after a long time off sick can be difficult, no matter how well-prepared they feel before they go back. They report that tasks that were easy before the stroke become more difficult afterwards, and that regaining skills, confidence and stamina can take a long time.

### Action you can take

Here are some tips if you feel you're not doing well at work or getting the support you need.

- Speak to your line manager or occupational health advisor. See if they can suggest any further reasonable adjustments.
- Ask for a re-assessment from your NHS occupational therapist or from Access to Work.

Stroke is complex. Over time effects may change and some can improve. Sometimes new effects appear. Speak to your occupational therapist or vocational rehabilitation advisor in your local area and explain you need more support at work.

If you feel that you're not getting the reasonable adjustments or other support you need at work, try to get some individual advice. Speak to a trade union representative if you have one. If not, Acas can help with work-related disputes. See Section 5: 'Where to get help and information' for contact details.

### Can I be dismissed for taking long-term sick leave?

In some cases it will be considered legally 'fair' for an employer to dismiss an employee due to long-term illness. In these situations, the employer is first required to consider as many ways as possible to help their employee back to work.

If the employer decides to pursue an ill-health dismissal, they should:

- Obtain medical evidence (with the employee's permission).
- Arrange an occupational health assessment.
- Prove that no reasonable adjustments can be made to enable the employee to do their job.

"I needed two occupational therapy assessments. One straight after my stroke and one seven months later when I returned to work and found my problems had changed."

**Catherine, stroke survivor**

## Unfair dismissal

If your employer fails to take the above steps, or if you disagree with your employer's interpretation of the medical recommendations, you may be able to bring a claim for unfair dismissal.

If you think your employer is behaving unlawfully you should seek professional advice. You can get advice from a solicitor, a trade union or an organisation like Acas or Citizens Advice.

If you need to make a claim to an employment tribunal, the time limit for making a claim is three months minus one day from the unlawful act. It's important not to delay in getting advice.

The best way to avoid dismissal is to stay open and honest about your support needs, and keep in contact with your employer about your recovery.

## Income protection for self-employed people

If you are self-employed, you might have an insurance policy which offers to provide some kind of payment or income if you are seriously ill. Most policies cover some types of ill health but not others. For example, most cover stroke but many do not cover stress. Many illness insurance policies have a waiting period before you can make a claim. Contact your policy provider to find out what you are entitled to.

### Ending your employment

#### Redundancy

Employers have to consult with you before making your role redundant. The same arrangements and requirements for redundancy will apply for disabled people as for non-disabled employees.

Employers need to ensure that disabled employees can fully join in the consultation. They must ensure that the person gets the information, fully understands the proposals, and has had the same chance as any other employee to contribute to the consultation process.

This may mean asking for extra time to read and make sense of documents. If your employer has not consulted with you before making you redundant, you should seek the help of an experienced adviser from an organisation such as Citizen's Advice or Acas (see Section 5: 'Where to get help and information' for details). You could contact your trade union if you are a member.

You cannot be selected for redundancy based on your disability. This could be grounds for unfair dismissal.

#### Retirement

If retirement is an option, you will need to think about it very carefully. Many people seek independent financial advice before deciding to retire. The UK government offers a free pensions advice service to people aged 50 or over at [pensionwise.gov.uk](https://pensionwise.gov.uk).

There are different types of retirement, with different benefits. Early retirement may mean you get a smaller pension while medical retirement may not. Your employer and pension scheme officers will be able to help you find out if you are eligible for medical retirement.

Many people enjoy the freedom and relaxation of retirement. But others find they miss the companionship, structure, and routine of working, as well as the income and status. Your decision to retire will be personal to you and your circumstances.

If you choose retirement, think about some activities and things you'd like to achieve, so that your time is enjoyable.

# Section 4: Changing careers and volunteering

If you decide not to continue in the job or occupation you were doing before your stroke, it may be possible to stay at the same company but retrain or change roles. You might take some time to look at your options and consider a career change.

Explore the different options that are available to you with the help of a Work Coach or IPES (Individual personalised employment support) at Jobcentre Plus. Free careers advice is available at the National Careers Service website [nationalcareers.service.gov.uk](https://nationalcareers.service.gov.uk).

"Not being able to return to my previous job after my stroke allowed me to re-think what I wanted to do with my life. I could have died, but I didn't. I wanted to do something to help others, and that is what I now do."

Alvin, stroke survivor

## Re-thinking your options

If you decide to start job-hunting, see it as an opportunity to choose a new career.

Don't feel limited by your previous job roles: think the unthinkable! Play with new ideas about what you wish to do.

It can take a long time to find ideas for a new career and look for jobs, so allow yourself plenty of time. Some people use a stroke as an opportunity to re-evaluate their lives and this could involve re-training or starting a new career.

"My stroke was a chance to re-evaluate my life [and] I re-trained as a radiographer. If you want a change in life, you have to just go for it!"

Adrian, stroke survivor

### Quick guide to thinking about a career change

Think about your hobbies, skills and interests. What new job can you see yourself doing? Do you enjoy working with children? Are you a keen gardener? Pick something you enjoy and that interests you.

There are many types of courses and qualifications available. These include introductory courses or formal qualifications such as an NVQ (National Vocational Qualification) or a university degree. You can sometimes do a taster course to see if you enjoy the subject and like the place you are studying in.

The types of centres that offer qualifications can vary. Most areas have a local college or further education centre. Your local authority will usually list all local college and places where you can study on their website. You can browse the courses available and contact the course leader directly if you have any questions.

Be realistic about how frequently you can attend classes. Think about your energy levels and travelling time if you have fatigue or mobility difficulties. You could start with a shorter course and build up to a longer one.

Most colleges and further education centres offer additional support to disabled students. This can mean a support worker to take notes in class, specialist software, or additional time to complete assignments. When applying for a course, explain you have a disability and ask what the college can offer to support you.

### Applying for jobs

There are more than 4.1 million disabled people in employment in the UK, and many employers now have a good awareness of disability. But it can be hard work looking for a new job. Most stroke survivors have said it was their own determination and motivation that landed them a job so be patient, proactive and persistent. When applying for jobs, always tailor your CV to the specific job you are going for

#### **Tip: look out for the Disability Confident scheme**

The Disability Confident scheme means that an employer is taking positive steps to employ disabled people. Employers who join the scheme are committed to interview all applicants with a disability who meet the minimum criteria for a job vacancy. You will be considered on your own abilities. The employer also promises to support people with disabilities in the workplace.

## Disclosing a disability on a form or at interview

In your application, account for gaps in your employment by explaining when you took time off for rehabilitation and recovery. List any courses or volunteering you did after the stroke. Remember to focus on your skills, experience and suitability for the job. Be positive and proactive.

At interview, if you feel someone is making assumptions about your disability, ask questions about the role and explain how you will fulfil the duties.

Some employers will have very little experience of working with people with disabilities or health problems. If you are asked about how you would approach tasks, you could mention the ways that you have found to do things, such as using aids and technology to help you with planning or physical work.

Employers often say that they recruit the best person for the job, regardless of whether that person has a disability.

Some stroke survivors worry that admitting their stroke or disability on an application form will mean employers will not interview them, let alone offer them a job. But this is not necessarily the case.

"The day before my interview I was really stressed as I couldn't wear high heels like I did before my stroke, or use my right arm to shake hands. I realised that I had to remove embarrassment by explaining I'd had a stroke, and would shake with my left hand. I needn't have worried. They were far more interested in my experience and didn't pay any attention to my physical problems."

**Sam, stroke survivor**

### Volunteering

If you don't wish to go back into paid work or don't feel ready, volunteering can be a great way to keep active and build your confidence.

How volunteering can help you:

- Lets you explore new hobbies and interests.
- Helps build new skills or develop skills you haven't used in a while.

Allows you to meet new people. This can help with feelings of isolation many people face after a stroke.

### Quick guide to picking the right volunteering opportunity

Think about your skills and interests. What appeals to you? Are you a keen gardener? Do you like working with the public? Pick something that you enjoy doing and that interests you.

If you are unable to travel long distances due to fatigue or mobility difficulties, think about what exists in your local area. A list of volunteering organisations is included at the end of this guide.

Think about how often you would like to volunteer. It can be a good idea to start once a week and build up to more if you feel able to.

Think about your energy levels and travelling time. You could start with four-hour shifts and build up to longer periods.

Ask what training is available. Many organisations have a dedicated volunteer team. As you are giving up your time, you will often be rewarded by training sessions and other volunteer resources. Most organisations will reimburse expenses such as lunch and travel.

## Things to consider

It can sometimes take a while to organise a volunteering position. For instance if you are working with vulnerable groups like children, you may need a Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) check which can sometimes take a while to come through.

If there are no current vacancies, you can ask to go on a waiting list

Be persistent! Approach a few different organisations and you're more likely to have success.

"I had to give up my job as a music teacher after a stroke. I was devastated, because teaching was my life. I carried on playing the piano as part of my rehabilitation. I then discovered I loved meeting other stroke survivors and telling them how I dealt with the effects of stroke.

I started to volunteer with my occupational therapist working on a stroke ward with people who had no speech. Then I became a Stroke Ambassador and now regularly share my story inspiring and motivating others."

**Dav, Stroke Ambassador**

# Section 5: Where to get help and information

## From the Stroke Association

### Helpline

Our Helpline offers information and support for anyone affected by stroke, including family, friends and carers.

Call us on **0303 3033 100**, from a textphone **18001 0303 3033 100** or email **helpline@stroke.org.uk**.

### Read our information

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

### 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** today.

### Talk to others affected by stroke

There may be a stroke group in your local area where you can meet other stroke survivors. You can meet people on our My Stroke Guide online chat forum at **mystrokeguide.com**, and our Facebook page **Facebook.com/TheStrokeAssociation**.

Call our Helpline or visit **stroke.org.uk/support** for more information on stroke groups and other face-to-face support.

## Rights, legal help and benefits

### Acas (Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service)

Acas provides free and impartial information and advice to employers and employees on all aspects of workplace relations and employment law. If things go wrong they help by providing conciliation to resolve workplace problems.

Acas operates in England, Wales and Scotland.

Website: **acas.org.uk**

Helpline: **0300 123 1100**

### Disability Law Service

Provides access to free advice on legal topics, including employment, for people with disabilities and their carers.

Website: **dls.org.uk**

Tel: **020 7791 9800**

### Disability Confident

This replaces the Two Ticks scheme.

Employers can sign up to be Disability Confident. They take part in training and activities to improve their recruitment and retention of people with disabilities. Resources and advice about disability and employment are available on the website.

Website: **gov.uk/disability-confident**

### Disability Rights UK

Information and individual advice about benefits and government schemes that are available. It also provides disability confidence training for employers.

Website: **disabilityrightsuk.org**

Tel: **020 7250 8181**

## Support with job-seeking and in the workplace

### Ability Net

Ability Net provides information and advice on how people can use technology to achieve their goals in work or education. They have developed Clear Talents, a free tool to help you and your employer identify reasonable adjustments.

Website: [abilitynet.org.uk](http://abilitynet.org.uk)

Helpline: 0800 269 545

### Access to Work

This scheme provides practical advice and funding for disabled people to allow them to find or stay in work. It offers an initial assessment of the workplace and the employee's tasks. The advisor makes recommendations for additional support such as adapted equipment, one-to-one coaching, or a support worker. The scheme can also help with transport to work.

You get a grant to pay for the support you need. The money doesn't have to be paid back and will not affect your other benefits.

Access to Work in England, Wales and Scotland.

Website: [gov.uk/access-to-work](http://gov.uk/access-to-work)

Tel: 0800 121 7479

textphone: 0800 121 7579

### Access to Work (NI) in Northern Ireland:

Website: [nidirect.gov.uk/articles/access-work-practical-help-work](http://nidirect.gov.uk/articles/access-work-practical-help-work)

### Fit for Work (England and Wales)

Fit for Work offers work-related occupational health information.

Website: [fitforwork.org](http://fitforwork.org)

Tel: 0800 032 6235 (English) or

0800 032 6233 (Cymraeg)

### Jobcentre Plus

To find a local Jobcentre Plus use the postcode finder on [gov.uk/contact-jobcentre-plus](http://gov.uk/contact-jobcentre-plus).

Website: [jobcentreguide.org/](http://jobcentreguide.org/)

The online careers and job seeking guide from Jobcentre Plus. Offers advice on looking for work and skills such as applying for jobs online.

### National Careers Service (England)

Website: [nationalcareers.service.gov.uk](http://nationalcareers.service.gov.uk)

This site has a free skills assessment tool plus tips on career changing, training and access to individual careers advice.

### Remploy

Remploy supports people to find sustainable employment in a wide range of roles with many of the UK's top employers.

Remploy operates in England, Wales and Scotland.

Website: [remploy.co.uk](http://remploy.co.uk)

Tel: 0300 456 8110

Email:

[employmentservices.osc@remploy.co.uk](mailto:employmentservices.osc@remploy.co.uk)

### Volunteering

#### Volunteering at the Stroke Association

Our volunteer roles provide opportunities to make a difference and do something you enjoy. By choosing to donate your time to us, you'll become an essential part of a team committed to preventing strokes and reducing their effect. You can change the lives of those affected by stroke, and it could change your life too.

Volunteer opportunities across the UK can be found on our website at **[stroke.org.uk/volunteering](https://stroke.org.uk/volunteering)**. If you can't find anything that fits your skills and interests, please contact **[volunteering@stroke.org.uk](mailto:volunteering@stroke.org.uk)** and we can talk about what options might be available for you.

Website: **[stroke.org.uk/volunteering](https://stroke.org.uk/volunteering)**  
Email: **[volunteering@stroke.org.uk](mailto:volunteering@stroke.org.uk)**

#### Do-it Trust

Their website lists hundreds of volunteer opportunities and is easy to search.  
Website: **[do-it.org](https://do-it.org)**

### Other organisations and guidance for employers

#### Different Strokes

Website: **[differentstrokes.co.uk](https://differentstrokes.co.uk)**

Tel: **0345 103 7172**

Different Strokes supports younger stroke survivors with information, support groups and fitness activities.

#### Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC)

Information for employers about their duties under the law and making reasonable adjustments.

Website: **[equalityhumanrights.com](https://equalityhumanrights.com)**

#### EHRC Information for employers in Scotland

Website: **[equalityhumanrights.com/en/commission-scotland](https://equalityhumanrights.com/en/commission-scotland)**

# 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. That's because a stroke happens in the brain, the control centre for who we are and what we can do. It happens every five minutes in the UK and changes lives instantly. Recovery is tough, but with the right specialist support and a ton of courage and determination, 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

**Stroke**  
Association

© Stroke Association 2021

Version 3 Published: February 2021

Next review: April 2023

Item code: **A01F45CG**

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The Stroke Association is registered as a charity in England and Wales (No 211015) and in Scotland (SC037789). Also registered in the Isle of Man (No. 945) and Jersey (No. 221), and operating as a charity in Northern Ireland.