

# Stroke News

SPRING 2013 Volume 31.1

## Meet the Aylen family

Step out for stroke

How Rachel went the distance

How my dog looks after me

Grace and Geri are ideal housemates

Your health

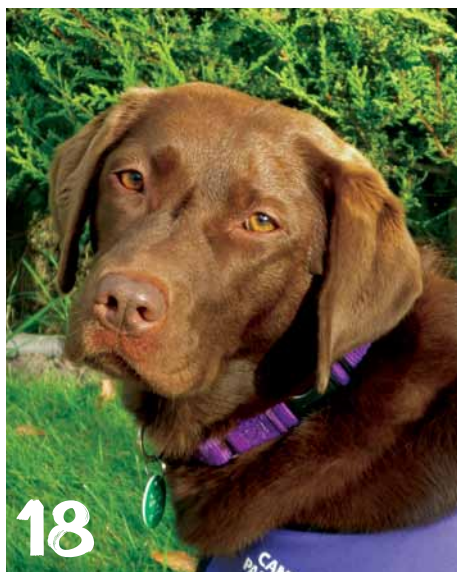
Dealing with anxiety after stroke

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*Stroke News* is published by  
the Stroke Association  
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Volume 31.1 Spring 2013

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# Welcome...



Spring has arrived at last. And whilst we can't tell whether it will bring sun, rain, wind or sleet, at least we can rely on having more daylight and longer days at our disposal. Suitably then, this issue is all about getting out and about. No matter how active you are, there are plenty of ideas in the pages that follow from *Step out for Stroke* (page 12) to gardening (page 20) and photography (page 15).

Rebuilding your life after stroke can be an emotional

rollercoaster. In our cover feature, Andrew and Alison Aylen share the challenges they've faced together, since Andrew had three strokes at the age of just 21 (page 8). And psychiatrist Dr Tony Saunders offers us an insight into how he suffered post-traumatic stress after having a stroke (page 16). For guidance on coping with depression and anxiety after stroke, turn to pages 7 and 26.

We also meet John Manning, whose first-hand experience

of stroke led him to set up a radio station for stroke survivors (page 11), and Grace Gurney reveals how her dog rescued her from loneliness (page 18). Finally, in our *Money matters* article, you can find out about the latest benefit changes (page 21).

Whatever the weather brings this spring, I hope you'll draw inspiration from this issue of *Stroke News*.

**Jane Butler**  
**Editor, *Stroke News***

## Volunteer spotlight

### Stan Bradberry

Stan Bradberry understands all too well the devastating impact that aphasia can have. "My wife, Julia, became aphasic about 10 years ago after a stroke secondary to leukaemia. The availability of speech therapy was limited, so I learnt what I could from the therapists and continued to give her help at home."

He recognised the importance of providing his wife with time, support and encouragement in finding new ways to communicate. "I wanted to tailor therapy to be more specific to Julia's needs, so I compiled crossword puzzles with

key conversation words that she needed to relearn as answers." Despite having worked as a GP, in the beginning Stan found there were still gaps in his understanding: "I realised that Julia couldn't mime the questions she wanted to ask and confused 'yes' and 'no' answers, which could be quite misleading."

Today, Stan uses his experience to volunteer at the local Thornhill Stroke Support Service in Southampton, where he helps clients find ways to communicate. Stan explains: "Stroke support groups

form an important part of the recovery process, and because many of these groups are voluntary, the economic benefits of encouraging support for the Stroke Association to maintain them should be noted by politicians and GP Commissioning Groups alike."



# Dear Stroke News

## On the mend

I had my stroke in January 2012, a day after having a right hip replacement operation. When I left hospital I was unable to walk, and relied on the services of care workers to come in each morning to help me wash and dress. The goal, each day, was to do as much as I could. Within a short time, I was washed and dressed and walking down to open the door and greet the care workers. The next challenge was showering. After a few attempts I got the hang of it and the care workers were no longer required.

All in all I have made a good recovery, but still have a weakness in my left arm and I know that my brain is not as sharp as it was – still, I am alive and fighting to move forward. I am a member of the Weston Active Stroke Group, which is a fantastic support group.

**Frank Cole**

## Dressing after stroke

Dressing myself since having a stroke in August 2011, has been my greatest frustration. Sometimes it's okay, other days I am shocking in my attempts! I even put my shoes on the wrong feet! I find getting thick socks or tights on hard work, but I cope with buttons and zips quite well. I have wasted so much of my time and my carers' time in the morning. They've tried giving me marks out of ten every day and I feel great when I get ten out of ten all week.

**Jean Barr**

## To cap it all...

In the latest *Stroke News* issue, I noticed an article about a stroke survivor who was initially refused service in a pub due to a speech difficulty following his stroke.

Last summer, I visited a local restaurant with my family and the manager asked me to remove my protective cap, worn to protect my skull after a craniotomy op, following my stroke in 2010. My wife explained the reason why it was worn – however the manager was reluctant to grant my request.

Recently, I visited the same restaurant only to be met by the manager who apologised and stated that I was welcome to visit and wear my protective hat anytime. On a final note, I have found *Stroke News* both informative and inspirational during my recovery.

**Mr P D Johnson**



## Hot topics

In our last issue (Winter 2012), we asked you about the challenges of dressing after stroke. Thank you to everyone who shared their experiences. In the next issue, we'd like to share your top travel tips for the ultimate relaxation experience when away. So please write in and let us know your suggestions.



Please email your views to **[strokenews@stroke.org.uk](mailto:strokenews@stroke.org.uk)** or write to:

**Stroke News  
Stroke Association  
Stroke Association House  
240 City Road  
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We look forward to hearing from you.

# Let's all do our bit this May...



## Our second Action on Stroke Month is coming

During May, stroke community fairs will be taking place throughout the UK.

So why not encourage your local community to raise awareness of stroke or you could even organise your own fair?

You can find out more or order your pack by visiting [www.stroke.org.uk/strokemonth](http://www.stroke.org.uk/strokemonth) or calling **0207 566 1500**.

This year's theme focuses on the emotional impact of stroke. Life after stroke can be tough

for everyone affected, and many people feel they don't get the emotional support they need. We carried out a survey to find out more. A huge thank you for your responses – we'll be sharing the findings with you shortly.

## The importance of having a break

When a stroke happens, it is a shock for everyone concerned especially when day-to-day support is needed, often from a loved one. Being a carer can be tiring and frustrating and if you've had the stroke, you may feel dependent and a burden. Respite is an important way of coping – a chance to have a break and recharge the batteries.

Respite could be care support at home for a few hours, a lunch out, a social outing or a longer residential break. Services vary but social services will know what's available in your area.

We've been working with Vitalise, the respite charity, to help improve the breaks they offer to people affected by stroke. Last autumn, several couples stayed at Netley Waterside House in Southampton and shared their thoughts. One carer said it was "relaxing knowing there was always someone there to help if need be." Another carer commented, "The outings were particularly well organised with someone to help my husband and take responsibility. My husband enjoyed it too!"



By taking on board all of the feedback, Vitalise is now thinking about how it can make its breaks even more valuable for people affected by stroke. To find out more visit [www.vitalise.org.uk](http://www.vitalise.org.uk)



# Know your blood pressure

## 10 years of *Know your blood pressure*

High blood pressure is the biggest risk factor for stroke. By knowing and managing your blood pressure, you can take control of your health and reduce your risk of stroke. Each year, we check the blood pressure of around 30,000 people at our *Know your blood pressure* events.

*Know your blood pressure* day will take place on 20 April. Find your nearest event on our website: [www.stroke.org.uk/kybp](http://www.stroke.org.uk/kybp) or call **01527 908918**.

As well as having your blood pressure checked at least once a year (or more if you are diagnosed with high blood pressure), there are some simple steps you

can take to help keep high blood pressure at bay.

- Cut down on salt.
- Be as active as possible.
- Stop smoking.
- Limit the amount of alcohol you drink.

During our 10th anniversary of *Know your blood pressure*, we have more events planned than ever before. Many are organised by Rotarians in local Rotary Clubs who have supported our campaign since the start. We are tremendously grateful to Rotary International in Great Britain and Ireland for all their support over the last 10 years and look forward to many more successful years of working together.



## Make someone's day

Give a lot more than just beautiful flowers by using Charity Flowers. Choose from a selection of stunning bouquets that can be sent anywhere in the UK and the Stroke Association will receive 15% of the bouquet value. Call **0870 5300 600** or visit [www.charityflowers.co.uk](http://www.charityflowers.co.uk)

## In brief

- The Stroke Association is supporting *Find Me Good Care*, a new service from the Social Care Institute for Excellence (SCIE), to help you make choices about care and support for yourself or other people in England. It combines advice and information about choosing care with a comparable database of services. You can search for care and support services in your area on their site [www.findmegoodcare.co.uk](http://www.findmegoodcare.co.uk)
- We've teamed up with *Yours* magazine for this year's Life After Stroke Awards. *Yours* will be supporting our Adult Courage Award (65 years +) and Editor Valery McConnell will be helping us to select this year's winners. Thank you for your support *Yours*!

# Coping with depression after stroke

Around half of stroke survivors suffer depression in the first year. If you're feeling very low, it can be hard to talk about it or know how to cope.



Depression is characterised by feelings of persistent sadness, helplessness and hopelessness. Many people don't want to admit to how bad they are feeling or acknowledge that they may be depressed.

Peter Bithell, from Manchester, had a stroke four years ago at the age of just 36. He was outgoing and active, but after his stroke he had to stop work and stay at home. He can't play football anymore or do other physical activities for long because he gets very tired.

The limitations caused by his stroke have had a huge impact on Peter and he has struggled with depression ever since. At times it means that he doesn't want to go out or socialise, and sometimes he finds it difficult to get out of bed.

Peter has found that one of the other issues is that people can't see depression. "When you meet people they think you're fine, because I look fine physically," explains Peter. "They can't see what's going on inside your head."

Despite these difficulties, Peter has received lots of help from his psychologist and attends

a local stroke support centre where he can talk to other people who are in similar positions. He also volunteers for the Stroke Association, which has helped him with his confidence. "It gives me a reason to go out and a sense of self-worth," explains Peter. Although he is still struggling, he says he's "on the up". He just wishes that more people understood the emotional effect that stroke can have.

If you suspect you have depression, it's important to get support from your doctor and family or friends. Our helpline can also direct you to specialist services (call us on 0303 3033 100).

## Some suggestions to help you cope:

- 1 Keep in touch with family and friends.**
- 2 Join a support group.** Meet others who have been through similar experiences.
- 3 Keep occupied.** Discover a new hobby or interest.
- 4 Look after yourself.** Keep as active as possible and you'll feel better for eating healthily.



"I was desperate to recover enough to ask Alison, my girlfriend, to be my wife."

# Where there's a will there's a way

Andrew survived three strokes when he was just 21 years old. It was devastating to be left with severe disabilities at such a young age, but now, ten years later, he is happily married with two beautiful children.





**A**ll I could do was to cope with each day at a time and hope for a future," says Andrew Aylen, who is 32 and from Aylesbury in Buckinghamshire.

"After my first stroke in 2000, I could walk but my speech wasn't great. Then I had another stroke which put me in a wheelchair for nine months. I also needed surgery after each stroke, which eventually caused me to develop epilepsy.

"I found it very difficult and was very worried about the future. But I was desperate to recover enough to ask Alison, my girlfriend, to be my wife. I didn't want to get married until I could walk and work again, so I set them as my recovery goals. When I came home I could only walk inside and Alison had to push my wheelchair when we were outdoors, but slowly things progressed and I can now walk to the local shop."

Andrew used to work in IT before his strokes and having done some stand-up comedy, he dreamed of becoming a stand-up comedian. Although he couldn't pursue that career, Andrew was keen to find a job. He explains: "I was determined to work, so after a year of recovering at home, I cleaned offices. I was just pleased to work. After a while it was too painful to carry on – it is hard to do manual jobs when you only have one arm to use." ▶





The couple now have two lovely children, Luke aged six and Abby aged two. Andrew looks after them most days while Alison works as a physiotherapist. "Andy is a fantastic dad," says Alison. "I know the children are lucky to spend so much time with him. He is incredibly patient with them and has a wonderful sense of humour. Equally I know he would love to be working, even if it was only part time. Our reality is that I have to work full time to financially support the family so Andy has to be there for the kids."

Andrew adds: "I struggle with things that others take for granted like changing nappies and it's hard to find the right words to ask certain questions, but I get there. It's been very rewarding seeing the children develop, but it can also be lonely because my experience is different to other parents."

Andrew also supports others who have been affected by stroke on a voluntary basis through his group, the Aylesbury Strike Back Club. Andrew says that being part of the group makes him feel normal. "Doctors and physios don't always understand – they only know what the textbooks tell them, but if you have had a stroke then you have an idea – it's important to hear from others who have been through the experience," he explains. "We talk about sport or try and see if we can get anywhere with bowling with one hand – it doesn't matter if we're bad, at least we've tried."

Alison adds: "Because Andy's strokes were ten years ago and we have been together all of this time, it's easy for me to forget how much of a struggle things are for him. I slip into the habit of finishing his sentences,

which is so unhelpful to someone with aphasia."

Andrew was recently asked to deliver a talk to 30 first year physiotherapy students at Oxford Brookes University. "He delivered this with the perfect mix of humour and seriousness," says Alison. "The students said that they wished they had met him sooner because then they would have understood stroke better." They also mentioned how it helped them to understand how important it is not to 'help' patients by finishing their sentences for them.

"Other people don't realise how much Andrew struggles because in many ways his disabilities are hidden," says Alison. "His pure determination proves that where there's a will there's a way. I am so proud of everything he has achieved."





# Returning to the airwaves

John Manning, from Glasgow, had been a successful radio presenter for 30 years, but his life completely changed when he had a stroke three years ago.

As he was going to bed, John knew something wasn't right. His arm was weak, he noticed he was dragging his foot, and as he looked in the mirror, he noticed part of his face had drooped. Having heard the FAST stroke recognition campaign, broadcast on his own station, John realised that he was having a stroke.

The effects, at first, were devastating. John couldn't speak at all or move properly. Having excelled in his radio career and been recognised by the Queen for his services to broadcasting, this was particularly hard for him to take. "I thought my life was over," says John, especially when his relationship sadly ended.

**"One of the hardest things for me was coming out of hospital and not knowing where to turn."**

But John was eager to regain control of his life: "I was determined to fight it. It's amazing how you can adapt."

With physiotherapy and speech therapy, John managed to recover his voice and walk again with the help of a walking aid. He wanted to resume his radio career, but found that certain doors had been closed to him. So he began his own initiative by converting his garage into a star-trek themed radio station.

Now John is offering support through his station for other people who have had a stroke. When asked what motivates him, John says, "I want people to know that they're not alone. One of the hardest things for me was coming out of hospital and not knowing where to turn."

John wants to set up programmes for people who are not able to communicate easily or get out of the house. He also hopes to help people find out about benefits and discuss basic needs such as learning to drive again. "A crucial part of this, is the importance of humour," says John. "Radio is theatre for the mind." He hopes to provide entertainment for his listeners and some light relief for anyone who may be at their lowest ebb.

**To find out more about John and his project, email him on: [scotpodcaptain@gmail.com](mailto:scotpodcaptain@gmail.com)**



# Rachel's half-mile challenge

Last year Rachel Inglefield, from London, and her family took part in *Step out for Stroke*. She tells us her story.

Our son was born on 21 February 2012, and ten days later I had a stroke and secondary bleeding on the brain. Pregnancy-related strokes like mine are apparently rare. I spent ten days in and out of hospital, being cared for in the Acute Stroke Unit.

Looking back, being in hospital was the easy bit as I had all the care and expert advice I needed. I had no idea that leaving hospital after a stroke was going to be such a terrifying and lonely experience. Not only

was I faced with the physical challenge of regaining my balance and movement, but also the emotional questions surrounding my future and recovery, especially with such young children. Immediately after the stroke, I had trouble walking and resorted to crawling or 'walking along' walls to keep myself upright in the house.

Last May, I set myself a challenge to walk half a mile. As part of the Stroke Association's *Step out for Stroke* walk, my family and friends all joined in to fundraise with me. Now half a mile was a huge challenge for me, but I needed something to work towards. I needed to feel that I could achieve something. I built up my strength, over the days, by walking to the postbox at the

end of the road and back – first clutching the pram, then holding onto someone and finally by myself.

The day of the walk, I was surrounded by my friends and family and it felt so good to know I had reached my goal.

Rachel and her family are taking part in *Step out for Stroke* again this year. We would love people of all abilities to come along and join her. We'll help you set your goal and enjoy a fun day out. This is also a great opportunity to get together with friends and family so why not invite them along to fundraise with you?

Find out more by visiting  
[www.stroke.org.uk/stepout](http://www.stroke.org.uk/stepout)  
or calling 029 2052 4426.





# Could anti-depressants aid stroke recovery?

Anti-depressants could reduce your disability and dependency after stroke, even if you are not depressed, according to recent research.

Research undertaken last year, at the University of Edinburgh, suggested that a class of anti-depressants called selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors (SSRIs) may reduce your dependency, physical disability, depression and anxiety, in the first year following your stroke.

The research also suggested that you could benefit from taking anti-depressants if you've had a stroke – even if you're not depressed.

"Anti-depressants have been successfully used for many years to relieve depression," says Professor Gillian Mead, Professor of Stroke and Elderly Care Medicine at the University of Edinburgh. "However, it now appears that they also have effects on the brain that may help patients make a better recovery from the physical effects of stroke.

"We don't yet fully understand how anti-depressants could boost recovery after stroke, but it may be because they promote the growth of new nerve cells in the brain, or protect cells damaged by stroke. Also, by preventing depression, the drugs may help patients to be more physically active, which is known to aid overall recovery.

"We now need to carry out a number of much larger clinical trials to establish exactly if, how and to what extent anti-depressants can help stroke survivors recover."

Recognising the need for further research, at the Stroke Association, we recently funded the start-up phase of a large trial. This will involve giving stroke survivors fluoxetine treatment (a type of anti-depressant) for six months after they have had a stroke.

It will test whether fluoxetine improves their mood, level of fatigue, language and memory difficulties as well as their physical recovery. Around 3,000 patients from all over the UK will be taking part in the trial.

"If the clinical trials are positive, anti-depressants could be used to reduce the disabling effects of stroke in tens of thousands of patients every year," says Dr Dale Webb, the Stroke Association's Director of Research and Information. "Although we are a long way off seeing anti-depressants given routinely to stroke patients, we look forward to the results of this promising research."

# Your £3 a month will help us to make major advances in stroke research

Please join the Stroke Association as a Research Partner and help us to push forward with vital research.

Research Partners are scientists, stroke survivors and supporters of the Stroke Association who are all playing an integral role in driving forward our research programme. Just £3 a month will help fund new research that is essential if we are to develop ground-breaking treatments, improve prevention methods and help stroke survivors to make their best possible recovery.



Help researchers like Dr Sprigg develop new treatments

Thanks to people like you, much of what is known about stroke has come from research funded by the Stroke Association. Last year, our supporters helped us to invest £2.8 million into stroke research. But our programme must continue if we are to discover life-saving medical breakthroughs. Will you support our research by donating £3 a month, please?



To set up a direct debit, please fill in your details below and return the form to: Freepost RRZA-KCEU-UKSB, Research Partners, Stroke Association, 1 Sterling Business Park, Salthouse Road, Northampton, NN4 7EX. Thank you.

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**If you would prefer to set up your Direct Debit or make a donation by phone, call 0300 330 0740.**

**You can also give online: [stroke.org.uk/donate](http://stroke.org.uk/donate)**

*giftaid it*

To enable us to claim the tax already paid on your donation, please tick and date below. This will mean that we'll receive an extra 25p for every £1 you donate.

A gift of £3 would be worth an additional 75p to help fund more vital research.

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# Picture This



Tony Watson, from Stechford in the West Midlands, has been taking pictures for over 40 years. He has had three strokes, which have left him with weakness on one side of his body and speech loss, but this hasn't stopped him from taking his stunning photos.

## How did you get into photography?

Many years ago, in my twenties, I joined a camera club in Birmingham and did very well in club competitions. I think I had the eye for it!

## So, how do you take such beautiful photos?

Always take a camera out with you – you never know when you might come across a good photo opportunity. Having a compact digital camera helps. Note the importance of foreground, background, angle, and light and try and be creative with each shot.

## How did the strokes affect you?

For many years I didn't do much photography due to work, etc. Then after my first stroke, feeling low, I was told about the local stroke club, and since then I have never looked back. It boosted my confidence wholeheartedly, and I started my photography again. It was a setback when I had the second and third strokes, but then again, the marvellous physio and speech therapy have helped me immensely.



**"This was taken last year when we went to the Farne Islands, off Northumberland. I took the picture on Staple Island where you can get off the boat and view the puffins."**

## What else has helped you?

My wife, Marlene, saved my life when I had my second stroke. She reacted really fast and now often helps at the stroke club baking cakes! I enjoy helping fellow stroke survivors now as a volunteer for the Stroke Association at the East Birmingham Stroke Club.





# How a stroke hit me — a



Many of us are familiar with the physical effects of stroke, but the emotional impact can be harder to recognise, as Dr Tony Saunders' story illustrates.

Tony Saunders, from Hampshire, had a stroke 14 years ago when he was 58. He had been exercising in the gym when, suddenly, his vision blurred and he fell sideways, hitting his head on the floor. He tried to get up but was unable to move. He then tried to talk but he wasn't able to.

Tony has very little memory of the ambulance or his journey to hospital. But he does remember becoming distressed and panicky as a result of what was happening, especially when his family visited him in hospital and he was unable to communicate with them. "It was a very frightening experience," says Tony. "I imagined my family were all thinking I was going to die; that was certainly what I was thinking at the time." Not being able to communicate made this an especially difficult time for Tony and his family.

When Tony was back at home after the stroke, he was very tired and he found it easier to let people speak to him, a skill he had developed in his role as a psychiatrist. He found that he had to push himself to talk. His speech and language therapist helped him to practise what he wanted to say in his mind before attempting to say it out loud, which worked but was a slow process. His speech became worse when he was tired, anxious or if he'd been drinking, but gradually this improved. Tony laughs: "Luckily, I can now drink again without the dreaded effects."

Tony was desperate to return to work as a child and adolescent psychiatrist, but returning after five months was too soon for him. "I found myself hesitating to talk in meetings, and sometimes stuttering," he recalls. "One of my colleagues said that initially I sounded like a dalek, but with





# psychiatrist's perspective

continued practice and by focusing on the rhythm of my speech I improved."

Although Tony had physiotherapy and speech and language therapy, he was offered very little support for his emotional needs after his stroke. He says, "Being able to laugh at my mistakes in my attempts to regain my speech was important to me. In the beginning I would confuse 'yes' with 'no'." His wife was a great support and he says that sharing the same sense of humour really helped his recovery.

Tony wanted to be able to share his experience of stroke with others, but found that when he told people about his stroke, he felt as though he was reliving the event and would imagine himself back

in the ward. This made him feel anxious – he'd start to stutter and he would lose his place in the story. As a psychiatrist, he realised that this is a common symptom of post-traumatic stress disorder. Thankfully, these vivid reactions have stopped over time.

Tony now gives regular talks to medical students about stroke, explaining what it feels like and what helped him in his recovery. They listen avidly because of his first-hand experience, not just because of his medical background. Tony would encourage other stroke survivors to attend groups or clubs where they can meet people who have had a similar experience and share their problems and advice.



Last autumn, at the Stroke Association, we carried out a survey to find out about the emotional impact of stroke. This has been our largest ever survey and we would like to express our huge thanks to everyone who took part. We received around 3,000 responses. Look out for the report based on the results, which will be published as part of **Action on Stroke Month**.

# Not just a man's best friend...



Grace Gurney tells us how her canine friend for life, Geri, helped her get her independence back.

74-year-old Grace has been through so much. She suffered from meningitis in her thirties and then became paralysed in her face, losing her hearing on the right side. She was diagnosed with a brain tumour, which later had to be removed. Grace needed further surgery on the nerves in her face.

When Grace's partner developed Alzheimer's disease, she became his carer. "The stress of that and my own health problems led me

to have a major stroke and I was in hospital for three months, paralysed down one side," says Grace.

"Eventually my partner passed away and I was left feeling vulnerable and alone. My balance is very poor on one side due to the stroke and my hearing loss, which means I find bending down very difficult." Grace heard about a gentleman who had a dog to help him and later applied for one herself through the charity, Canine Partners.

She could not believe her luck when they later contacted her to say they had a suitable mature dog. "When I went down, this chocolate lab came straight up to me – it felt like we knew each other already," recalls Grace.

Although a care team visits Grace in the mornings and evenings to help with tasks such as shopping, housework and organising her medication, she knows they cannot be there all the time. "My life is completely different now I have Geri. I was quite lonely before, but not now.

"She opens and closes doors, helping with many of the tasks that make me tired, which conserves my energy. She empties the washing machine for me, which is a great help as bending makes me dizzy and there is a risk I might fall. She picks up all sorts of things I drop and as my dexterity is a bit wobbly, she waits until she knows I have full hold of the item before letting go."

Geri is cherished by Grace for her patience. "Sometimes it takes me a while to get my words out, but Geri patiently sits and waits for her instructions until I'm ready."



## "Before Geri, I was having a stroke every three to six months, but I haven't had one since I had her."

Everyday tasks are much easier with Geri around. "She is always there for me whether it is to fetch my slippers, pull my socks off or generally help me with whatever I need doing."

She also provides Grace with peace of mind. Because Grace has had numerous strokes, she knows she is susceptible to having another. So Geri has been taught to open a sliding door at home and press the alarm should Grace be in trouble.

"Before Geri, I was having a stroke every three to six months, but I haven't had one since I had her," says Grace. Previously, she also felt very conscious of her face when going out, and her hearing problems made it difficult to cross roads. "Having Geri with me changes this so much," says Grace. "I feel I have a new sense of freedom thanks to Geri; we are regular ones for going out all over the place!" Now that Grace feels stronger, she has rejoined the choir at church and Geri sits by the organ quietly. "We go shopping and I have joined a friendship group. Having Geri with me helps to open up conversations and has broadened my social circle."

And Geri is also a creature of routine. "If I haven't got up by 7am, Geri jumps on the bed to check I am ok," laughs Grace. "Sometimes I fall asleep during the day and Geri always comes

up to me and puts her nose on my hand. If I don't respond, she nudges my arm or puts her front legs onto my lap to make sure there is nothing wrong with me.

"Geri is my carer as well as my companion. I feel I have won the lottery to have her in my life. I believe Geri was sent from God and we are both taking care of each other – she has given me hope."

**Canine Partners**  
**08456 580 480**  
**[www.caninepartners.org.uk](http://www.caninepartners.org.uk)**



# Gardening

## A great way to keep active and happy



Spending time in the great outdoors can really lift your mood, but you may prefer to stay a little closer to home. Doing some gardening can make you feel happy, healthy and more confident, as stroke survivors in Tameside have been finding out.

### Planting the seeds

Joyce Booth and colleagues have been running a stroke survivors' allotment in Tameside, in north-west England, since 2010.

Every week the group visits the allotment to tidy up the plot and grow vegetables.

### Take a seat

There are raised beds so that people can sit down whilst gardening, and tools are provided for everyone. There's even a greenhouse.

### Reaping what you sow

"It's become a bit of a family outing," says Joyce. "The local community has been very welcoming. The allotment was an eyesore when we started – you couldn't see the flowerbeds for the weeds! Those involved feel less isolated and much more confident being out and about, as well as more fit."

Janice, a volunteer, says it's hard work but rewarding. "I love it when we all sit around the table with drinks and biscuits laughing and chatting after

we've been working." Others enjoy escaping the everyday routine like John, who says, "It's very relaxing and makes you forget your worries".

If you're interested in joining a gardening group, call our helpline on **0303 3033 100** to see what services are available near you.

### Grow your own!

Why not try growing your own seasonal vegetables at home? Your vegetables will taste better and you'll save money on your shopping, too.

**March:** peas, beetroot, onions, sweet peas

**April:** strawberries, French beans

**May:** tomatoes, courgettes, pumpkins



### Useful contacts

- Visit the Stroke Shop to browse for specialist equipment: [www.strokeshop.org.uk/Exercise\\_and\\_Leisure/Gardening/default.aspx](http://www.strokeshop.org.uk/Exercise_and_Leisure/Gardening/default.aspx)
- Thrive, [www.thrive.org.uk](http://www.thrive.org.uk), helps people with disabilities continue to enjoy gardening. For useful tips visit [www.carryongardening.org.uk](http://www.carryongardening.org.uk)
- For information about eating and growing seasonal food, visit [eatseasonably.co.uk](http://eatseasonably.co.uk).



# Money matters

## Benefits: what are the latest changes?

This April, we'll see a huge change in the benefits system when Disability Living Allowance (DLA) is replaced by Personal Independence Payment (PIP). We answer some of your questions about the new benefit.

### What is Personal Independence Payment (PIP)?

If you are aged between 16 and 64, you can claim PIP to help towards some of the extra costs caused by your ill health or disability. To qualify, you must have had the condition for three months and it must be expected to last for at least another nine months. You can get PIP whether you are working or not. It is not means tested or taxed.

### I don't get DLA. How do I apply for the new benefit?

PIP is being introduced in some areas for new claims from April. From June PIP will be available in the rest of the UK.

As part of the application process, they will look at whether you are able to carry out essential tasks like looking after yourself, making decisions and communicating with other people.

You will make an initial claim on a form and then you will probably

have a face-to-face assessment with a healthcare professional.

### I get DLA. When will the changes affect me?

PIP will be introduced for new claims first, but eventually everyone now getting DLA will be reassessed for PIP.

If your circumstances change or your award period for DLA comes to an end, your new claim will be for PIP.

Otherwise, the earliest you will be asked to claim PIP instead of DLA is October 2015.



### Where can I get more information on how the changes to benefits might affect me?

There are other changes to benefits planned. If you are worried or would like more information our Stroke Helpline can tell you where you can get more specialist advice. Call **0303 3033 100** or email **info@stroke.org.uk**

# Looking for insurance cover that suits your needs?

**Do you want the confidence to feel carefree whilst you're away?** Having a stroke can affect your chances of getting travel insurance cover, or the cost of your premiums could be much higher than average. With this in mind, Stroke Association Insurance Services provide a range of insurance products specifically for stroke survivors, their families and carers.

**A customer from the West Midlands said:**

"Two or three people have mentioned the service to me and when I spoke to your team they were so understanding and kind. They know their job so thoroughly and are very efficient. The process is easy for the layman. I can understand all the questions asked and the price is competitive, too. I'm not a 21 year old with a clean bill of health, so don't expect to pay the same. I was made to feel as though I mattered!"

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To find out more, call 01603 828 396 – or visit [stroke.org.uk](http://stroke.org.uk) for a 5% discount when purchasing travel insurance online.

## Welcome to our Life After Stroke Centre

Have you visited our Life After Stroke Centre yet? It's based in Bromsgrove near Birmingham.

Our centre is a meeting place for anyone affected by, or with an interest in stroke. We're bringing the centre to life this year with the launch of our activities programme. You can benefit from regular advice and information sessions, drop-in services, with guidance on using computer programmes if you've had a stroke, and fun activities such as Tai Chi and singing.



To find out more call 01527 903903, email [lascevents@stroke.org.uk](mailto:lascevents@stroke.org.uk) or visit [www.stroke.org.uk/lifeafterstrokecentre](http://www.stroke.org.uk/lifeafterstrokecentre).



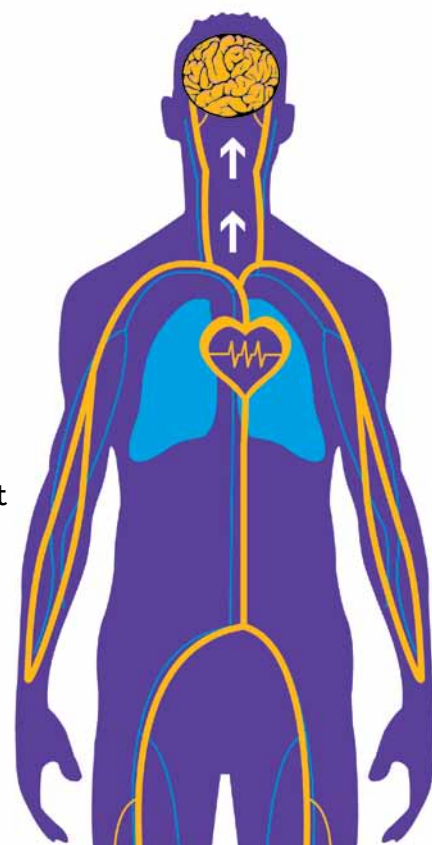
# Ask First

## to prevent a stroke later

Atrial fibrillation (AF) is the most common type of irregular heartbeat. It affects how your heart works and means that your heart may not be pumping as well as it should. As a result, blood clots are more likely to form in your heart, increasing your risk of stroke.

AF can cause symptoms such as palpitations (being aware that your heart is beating fast), breathlessness, chest pain or fatigue. Our *Ask First* campaign aims to raise awareness of this important condition and encourages people to 'ask first to prevent a stroke later'. If you are concerned about AF, or have any of these symptoms, ask your doctor to check your pulse.

If you have AF it's important that you get the right treatment – both to control your condition and to reduce your risk of having a stroke. Your GP will assess your risk and advise you on the right type of treatment for you.



For more information on AF, its link to stroke and to download useful resources visit our website at [www.stroke.org.uk/askfirst](http://www.stroke.org.uk/askfirst)

## Have you been affected by stroke?

### Then you probably have a lot to say.

The UK Stroke Assembly is the annual event for stroke survivors, family members and carers.

You will have the opportunity to:

- listen or participate in workshops
- learn from leading figures in stroke research, policy and campaigning
- share your stories with professionals, policy makers and other stroke survivors
- try out new forms of rehabilitation and relaxation
- meet other people affected by stroke.

This year we'll be covering:

- benefits, IT and stroke, alternative therapies, emotional wellbeing, stroke research and more.



**When?** 31 May and 1 June  
(choice of one or two days)

**Where?** East Midlands Conference Centre,  
Nottingham, NG7 2RJ

**How much does it cost?** Between £25 and £50 per person. This includes hotel fees and meals.

**How do I book?** You can book online or by post until 24 April.

To find out more call 0113 201 9792 or visit [www.strokeassembly.org.uk](http://www.strokeassembly.org.uk).

# What's on ac

Have fun and take action on stroke – there's something for everyone!

## Walks

**Glamis Castle  
Step out for Stroke Walk  
Scotland  
5 May**

☎ 0131 555 7252  
@stepout@stroke.org.uk

**London 2 Brighton  
Challenge**

**25 and 26 May**  
☎ 020 7940 1344  
@sarah.maling@stroke.org.uk

**Trans Pennine Challenge  
Manchester to Sheffield**

**22 and 23 June**  
☎ 0113 2019790  
@kirendeeep.madaheer@stroke.org.uk

**Thames Path Challenge  
14 and 15 September**

☎ 020 7940 1344  
@sarah.maling@stroke.org.uk

## Runs

**Rock 'n' Roll Half Marathon**

**Edinburgh  
14 April**  
☎ 0131 555 7252  
@scotlandfundraising@stroke.org.uk

**Brighton Marathon**

**14 April**  
☎ 020 7566 1523  
@anna.lee@stroke.org.uk

**London Marathon**

**21 April**  
☎ 020 7940 1344  
@sarah.maling@stroke.org.uk

**Resolution Run 5k**

**Beach Boulevard, Aberdeen  
28 April**  
☎ 0131 555 7252  
@scotlandfundraising@stroke.org.uk

**Manchester Marathon**

**28 April**  
☎ 0161 742 7467  
@rebecca.owen@stroke.org.uk

**EMF 5k/10k/Team Relay**

**Edinburgh  
25 May**  
☎ 0131 555 7252  
@edinburghmarathon@stroke.org.uk

**Edinburgh Marathon /  
Half Marathon**

**26 May**  
☎ 0131 555 7252  
@edinburghmarathon@stroke.org.uk

**Manchester 10K Run**

**26 May**  
☎ 0161 742 7484  
@events@stroke.org.uk

**Bupa London 10,000**

**27 May**  
☎ 020 7566 0311  
@claire.stoneman@stroke.org.uk

**The British 10k**

**London  
14 July**  
☎ 020 7940 1351  
@nicola.connolly@stroke.org.uk

**Virgin Active Marathon**

**London, 27 and 28 July**  
☎ 020 7940 1344  
@sarah.maling@stroke.org.uk

**Run to the Beat**

**London  
8 September**  
☎ 020 7566 1523  
@anna.lee@stroke.org.uk

**Great North Run**

**Newcastle  
15 September**  
☎ 0161 742 7469  
@greatnorthrun@stroke.org.uk

**Berlin Marathon**

**29 September**  
☎ 020 7566 1523  
@anna.lee@stroke.org.uk

**Royal Parks  
Half Marathon**

**London  
6 October**  
☎ 020 7940 1344  
@sarah.maling@stroke.org.uk

**Dublin City Marathon**

**28 October**  
☎ 028 9050 8053  
@eventsni@stroke.org.uk

## Jumps and abseils

**The Europa Abseil**

**Belfast  
Dates throughout 2013**  
☎ 028 9050 8053  
@eventsni@stroke.org.uk

**The Ultimate Skydive**

**Northern Ireland  
Dates throughout 2013**  
☎ 028 9050 8053  
@eventsni@stroke.org.uk





# ross the UK



## Rides

### Thames Bridges Bike Ride

London

12 May

☎ 020 7566 1523

@anna.lee@stroke.org.uk

### Ride 100

London

4 August

☎ 020 7940 1344

@sarah.maling@stroke.org.uk

## Sip for Stroke



Why not get together with friends and organise a Sip for Stroke party?

You can call **0207 566 1525** or email [sipforstroke@stroke.org.uk](mailto:sipforstroke@stroke.org.uk) to find out about events in your area.

## Swims

### Great North Swim

Cumbria

15 and 16 June

☎ 0161 742 7469

@greatnorthswim@stroke.org.uk



You can help make a difference in a matter of seconds. Text 'Stroke' to 70007 to make a donation of £5 and support our vital work today.

Texts cost £5 plus your standard network rate of which a minimum of £4.70 will go to the Stroke Association. Full terms and conditions at [www.stroke.org.uk/textterms](http://www.stroke.org.uk/textterms)

## Stroke stars

Two teams of swimmers from Mourant Ozannes, in the Channel Islands, have raised more than £8,000 for people affected by stroke. They completed an unprecedented simultaneous inter-island relay challenge.

The teams achieved their remarkable feat last September in a combined time of just over 24 hours, with the Jersey to Guernsey leg swum in 11 hours 40 minutes 37 seconds and the team from Guernsey reaching the Jersey coast in 12 hours 20 minutes. It's thought to be

the first time ever that the Jersey to Guernsey direction leg has been completed.

Both teams battled choppy water, jellyfish, and mist, but they were spurred on by the Channel Islands Airsearch plane, which made several low passes over the swimmers.

"We were overjoyed when we completed the swim," says Mark Torode, who led the Guernsey team. "We had put in so much planning and preparation, but it



was never a sure thing that we would succeed. Now that we have totalled the funds raised we are even more delighted. Not only do I have to thank the team who took part, but we are all very grateful to those who have supported the Guernsey Stroke Association." The challenge was achieved thanks to the help and expertise of a number of volunteers who helped with planning and preparation, and crewed the support craft.



# Feeling anxious

It's common to experience a rollercoaster of emotions after stroke, whether you're caring for a loved one or have had a stroke yourself. If you're losing sleep worrying, it's important to recognise your feelings and seek help.

As with many traumatic events, a stroke happens out of the blue and can leave you feeling helpless. It's common to feel anxious, depressed, frustrated, angry or bewildered afterwards. No two strokes are ever the same so try not to compare your experience with someone else's.

## What's wrong with me?

If you're feeling fearful and uneasy, it's likely you're suffering from anxiety. Have you noticed your heart beating faster or your muscles tensing a lot? This is the effect of adrenalin preparing you for action, which is a typical sign of stress. You may also feel short of breath and dizzy. Anxiety can arise suddenly, or may develop gradually.

## Would it help to pinpoint my anxieties?

Yes, it may help to identify what is worrying you most. Perhaps it is the fear of having another stroke, financial worries, being unable to communicate and feeling embarrassed in social situations, or being unable to drive or return to work.

## How can I help myself?

After identifying the source of your stress, a good starting point is to seek out information. Being informed takes away the fear that arises from uncertainty and gives you some control

over your situation. Our helpline can offer you support and information by phone or email (contact details below).

Find ways to relax your mind and body. There are lots of different ways to relax, like soaking in a hot bath, listening to calming music, reading, meditating, deep-breathing exercises or gardening. Try to find something that works for you and build it into your daily routine.

Don't suffer in silence. Share your feelings with someone close to you or contact us. We can also put you in touch with organisations that can help you to meet others in a similar situation. If your feelings of anxiety persist or get worse, let your doctor know. They should be able to recommend the right therapy for you.



## Our contact details

Our Stroke Helpline:

Call 0303 3033 100

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