

Stroke  
Association

# When you have a **stroke**

A short guide



## We're here for you

If you need more help and information, contact our Stroke Helpline on **0303 3033 100**, email [helpline@stroke.org.uk](mailto:helpline@stroke.org.uk), or visit [stroke.org.uk](http://stroke.org.uk).

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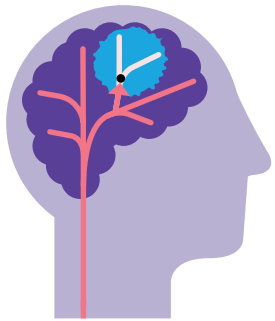
### Tip: shared reading

After a stroke it can be hard to understand things. Reading and talking about this guide with someone else can help you understand.

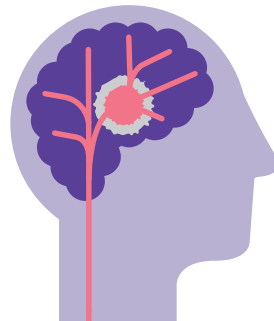
# Understand your stroke

When a stroke happens, part of the brain loses its blood supply. This damages the brain.

## There are two main types of stroke



**1. Ischaemic:**  
due to a blocked blood vessel in the brain.



**2. Haemorrhagic:**  
due to bleeding in or around the brain.

Ischaemic stroke is often referred to as a clot. Haemorrhagic stroke is often called a bleed.

### In hospital after a stroke

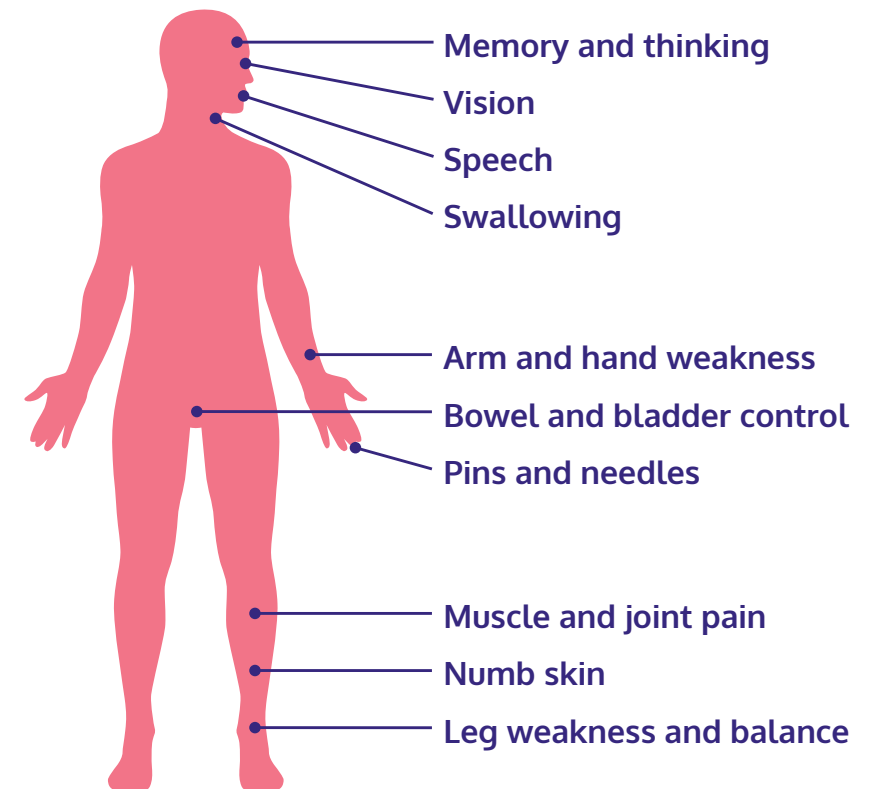
- You have brain scans, tests and treatments.
- You might feel tired and unwell.
- You might feel shocked and upset.
- Feeling confused is normal with a stroke.

## The effects of a stroke depend on two things

1. Where the stroke is in your brain.
2. How much the stroke has damaged your brain.

Every stroke is different. Your stroke and your recovery are unique to you.

This picture shows some of the main effects of stroke.





## A stroke can affect how you think and feel

Having a stroke often causes memory problems. You might have trouble concentrating. It can also make you feel very emotional.

## The hidden effects of stroke

After a stroke, you might have some 'hidden' effects:

- Fatigue: tiredness that does not get better with rest.
- Feeling anxious or low is common after a stroke.
- Changes to your behaviour, such as being more irritable or impulsive, or becoming very outspoken.
- Emotionalism: finding it hard to control your emotions.



The hidden effects of a stroke can be hard for you and others to understand. Try talking to your friends and family about them if you can.



## Get help with the effects of a stroke

If you are still in hospital, speak to your doctor, nurse or therapist. If you have left hospital, ask your GP for help.

## Communicating after a stroke

Many people have trouble communicating after a stroke. This can happen for different reasons:

1. Damage to the language areas of your brain can cause aphasia. People with aphasia can have a range of problems using language. They can find it hard to speak and understand speech, read, write and use numbers. Having aphasia does not mean that you are less intelligent, you simply have a problem using language.
2. Speech can be slurred due to weak muscles in your face.
3. Problems with your memory and concentration can make it hard to communicate.



# Recovering after a stroke

The biggest improvements usually happen in the first few months. But recovery can carry on for years. Each person recovers at their own rate.

## Feeling better

Energy levels take a while to return. Your body and brain need time to heal.

## Some problems are temporary

Many people get back control of their bladder and bowels. People can often speak and walk again soon after a stroke. Problems with swallowing, eating and drinking often get better quickly. Many other problems get better a few days or weeks after a stroke.



## People who help you after a stroke

Therapists, doctors and nurses give treatments and therapy to help your recovery. Friends and family can also support you.

## Rehabilitation

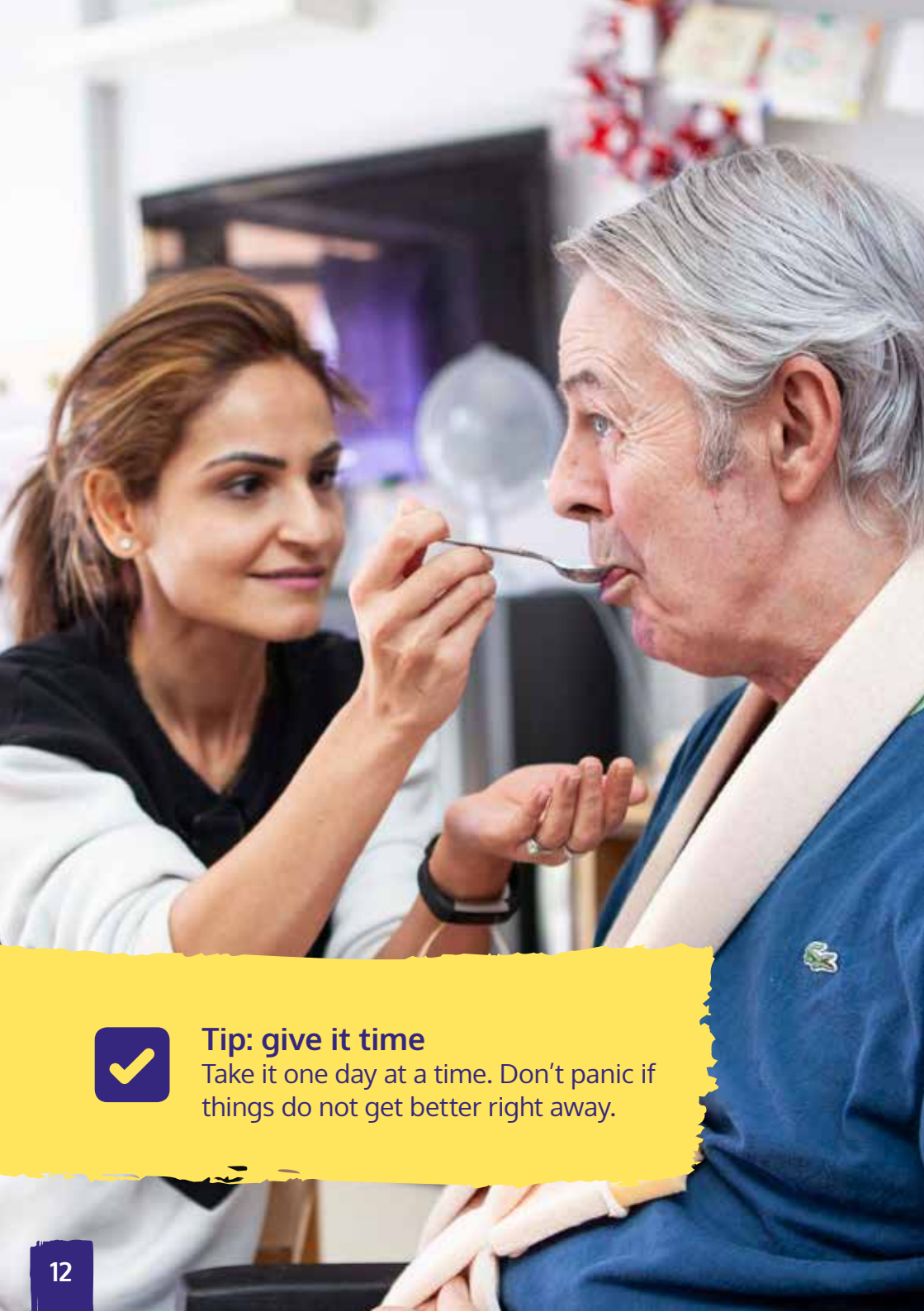
Many people need some rehabilitation therapy. Rehabilitation can help you make the best recovery possible for you. It can also help you re-learn skills for everyday life.

## How rehabilitation works

A therapist assesses your problems, and finds ways to improve them. Therapy starts soon after your stroke. You might do exercises to build stamina and help your recovery.

- If you have muscle weakness or paralysis down one side, therapy aims to help you to start moving. Therapy can help people to improve their balance and walking ability.
- Therapy can also improve skills like speaking and writing.
- If you have trouble using your arms and hands, therapy might help you learn new ways of doing everyday activities like dressing and cooking.

Rehabilitation starts with help from therapists, but you can continue on your own and with help from family and friends.



## Types of therapist

### Physiotherapist

Helps with strength, mobility, balance and stamina.

### Occupational therapist

Helps you regain independence by re-learning skills for everyday living.

### Speech and language therapist (SLT)

Helps you improve speech, and treats swallowing and eating difficulties. Also helps with reading and writing.

### Dietitian

Supports people with swallowing difficulties to eat and drink safely, and advises on healthy eating.

### Psychologist

Helps people with memory and thinking difficulties, and emotional problems like depression.



### Ask questions

At first it can be hard to understand what a stroke means. Medical staff and therapists will be happy to answer your questions.



### Tip: give it time

Take it one day at a time. Don't panic if things do not get better right away.

## Spotting the signs of a stroke

It's vital to know the warning signs of another stroke. Using the FAST test is the best way to do this.

### FAST test

# F

#### Face

Can the person smile?  
Has their face fallen on one side?



# A

#### Arms

Can the person raise both arms  
and keep them there?



# S

#### Speech problems

Can the person speak clearly  
and understand what you say?  
Is their speech slurred?



# T

#### Time

If you see any of these three  
signs, it's time to call **999**.



These are the main signs of a stroke. But there are some others to look out for:

- Sudden weakness or numbness on one side, including legs, hands or feet.
- Difficulty finding words or speaking in clear sentences.
- Sudden blurred vision or loss of sight in one or both eyes.
- Sudden memory loss or confusion, and dizziness or a sudden fall.
- A sudden, severe headache.

If you spot any of these signs, call **999** straight away.



Stroke can happen to anyone, at any age. Every second counts. If you spot any of these signs of a stroke, don't wait. Call **999** straight away.



# Reduce the risk of another stroke

When you have a stroke, doctors check you for any health conditions linked to stroke. You will be treated to lower the risk of another stroke. These health conditions include:

- High blood pressure.
- Atrial fibrillation (irregular heartbeat).
- Diabetes.
- High cholesterol.

One of the best ways to reduce your risk is to carry on with any treatment you are given.

You should be given advice about other ways of reducing your risk. Some people need to lose weight, give up smoking or drink less alcohol.

## Will I have another stroke?

Having another stroke can be a big worry for you, your friends and family. You may find it helpful to speak to your GP or stroke nurse. They can give you individual advice about your health conditions, and ideas for healthy lifestyle choices.

**i** If worry about another stroke makes you feel very anxious or low, contact your GP or call our Helpline.



For more ideas and information, read our guide 'How to reduce your risk of a stroke' or visit [stroke.org.uk](https://stroke.org.uk).

# You are not alone

Many stroke survivors say they feel isolated at first, and it can be hard to explain to other people what you are feeling. The shock of a stroke can change people's lives.

After leaving hospital, you should have support from stroke professionals, family and friends. They can all be part of your recovery. If you feel that you need more support, call our Helpline or contact your GP.

## Talk to others

It can help to talk to family and friends. You can talk about your feelings, and help other people understand what you are going through.

Some people find it helps to talk to others who share the experience of stroke. Over 1.2 million stroke survivors live in the UK, and the Stroke Association can help to put you in touch.

## Stroke groups

There may be a stroke group in your local area where you can meet other stroke survivors. Find your local group at [stroke.org.uk/support](https://stroke.org.uk/support) or call our Helpline.



# Where to get help and information

Our Stroke Helpline offers information and support for anyone affected by a stroke. This includes 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 detailed information about stroke online at **stroke.org.uk**, or call the Helpline to ask for printed copies.

## 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.

## Help with health and everyday living

### Stroke symptoms

If you have any more stroke symptoms, don't wait. Call **999** straight away. See **page 14** for the FAST test.

### Reducing your stroke risk

For individual advice on reducing your risk of a stroke, see your GP, specialist stroke nurse or pharmacist.

### Help with the effects of stroke

If you need help with emotional or physical problems after a stroke, see your GP.

### Support needs

For information on accommodation and help for carers, contact your local council social services department.

### Legal and money advice

For free, confidential advice about money, legal and employment issues, contact Citizens Advice **citizensadvice.org.uk**.



If you have trouble getting the support you need, call our Helpline.

## 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

Please be aware that this information is not intended as a substitute for specialist professional advice tailored to your situation. We strive to ensure that the content we provide is accurate and up-to-date, but information can change over time. So far as is permitted by law, the Stroke Association does not accept any liability in relation to the use of the information in this publication, or any third-party information or websites included or referred to.



### Joining a research study

You may be eligible to take part in a research study. Research helps us improve stroke diagnosis and care. If you are asked to be in a study, you can discuss any questions with the researchers, and you can also talk to your GP.

**When stroke strikes, part of your brain shuts down.** And so does a part of you. Life changes instantly and recovery is tough. But 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



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**Patient information awards**  
Highly commended

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