

# Words your medical team might use

When you talk to health professionals or read information about stroke, you might come across words you haven't heard before. These quick definitions should help.

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If you have any questions about stroke, call our Helpline on **0303 3033 100** or go to **[stroke.org.uk/what-is-stroke](https://stroke.org.uk/what-is-stroke)**

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Rebuilding lives after stroke

**Stroke**  
Association



| Word                             | Definition   |
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| Activities of daily living (ADL) | Things people do in day-to-day life. 'Basic ADL' includes things like washing and dressing. 'Extended ADL' might be shopping, laundry and cooking.   |
| Agnosia                          | When someone loses their ability to recognise things, even though their senses are working. Someone with visual agnosia can see, but can't recognise what or who they are seeing. Agnosia can also affect the ability to recognise music, speech, and parts of their own body. |
| Agraphia                         | Difficulty writing or drawing.   |
| Alexia                           | Difficulty reading, which may be linked to <b>aphasia</b> (see opposite) or problems with vision.  |
| Aneurysm                         | A weakening in an artery wall that bulges out and can sometimes burst and cause bleeding.  |
| Angioplasty                      | A surgical procedure to widen a blocked or narrowed artery. A balloon is inserted through a <b>catheter</b> (see below) and inflated inside the blood vessel.  |
| Anticoagulant                    | A drug that reduces the chance of blood clots forming.   |
| Aorta                            | The main artery which carries the blood from the heart to the rest of the body. All other arteries branch off the aorta.   |

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| <b>Aphasia</b>                          | Problems with speaking, understanding, reading and writing due to damage to the language centres of the brain. Aphasia is usually caused by a stroke on the left of the brain.  |
| <b>Apraxia</b>                          | Problems with carrying out familiar activities involving coordinated movements, such as getting dressed.  |
| <b>Arteriovenous malformation (AVM)</b> | A tangle of blood vessels prone to bleeding, usually there from birth. An arteriovenous malformation is particularly dangerous in the brain.                                    |
| <b>Aspiration</b>                       | When food or other material goes 'down the wrong way' and enters the lungs. Difficulty with swallowing following a stroke can put a person at risk of aspiration.               |
| <b>Aspirin</b>                          | A drug usually used to treat pain, fever, or inflammation. Long-term treatment with low doses of aspirin – usually 75mg – can stop blood clots developing.                      |
| <b>Ataxia</b>                           | Problems coordinating muscle movements, which can affect many areas, including walking, speech and fine hand movements, like using a pen.                                       |
| <b>Atrial fibrillation</b>              | A heart condition which causes an irregular and often abnormally fast heart rate.   |
| <b>Capacity</b>                         | The ability to take in, understand and retain information and use this to make decisions. A stroke can sometimes affect a person's capacity to make decisions about their care. |

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| <b>Cardiac monitor</b>               | A device used for monitoring heart activity.  |
| <b>Cardioembolic stroke</b>          | A stroke caused by a blood clot that forms in the heart and travels to the brain.   |
| <b>Care Quality Commission (CQC)</b> | The Care Quality Commission registers, inspects and reports on health and social care services in England. Its aim is to improve services and eliminate bad practice.   |
| <b>Care home</b>                     | A type of residential accommodation with trained staff available to support people who live there. People may stay in care homes for short or longer periods when they struggle to look after themselves at home. |
| <b>Care plan</b>                     | A map or plan of someone's needs and how they are being met.  |
| <b>Carer's assessment</b>            | An assessment by the local council to look at what support or assistance a carer needs to continue in their caring role.  |
| <b>Carotid artery</b>                | Large blood vessels on either side of the neck, supplying blood to the face and the brain.  |
| <b>Catheter</b>                      | A long thin flexible tube that's inserted into the body. Catheters can be used for different things, for example one may be inserted into a blood vessel or to empty the bladder.                                 |
| <b>Clopidogrel</b>                   | A medicine that reduces the risk of blood clotting.   |

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| <b>Cognition</b>       | Thinking, learning, memory and understanding.   |
| <b>Community nurse</b> | A nurse who works in the community rather than in a hospital. Community nurses work with people in their own homes and in schools and health centres. |
| <b>Consultant</b>      | A senior specialist hospital based doctor.  |
| <b>Craniotomy</b>      | Surgery to remove part of the bone from the skull to expose the brain.  |
| <b>CT scan</b>         | A scan using X-rays to build up a computerised picture of the inside of the body or brain.  |
| <b>Day care centre</b> | A place where people can go during the day to eat, socialise and take part in activities.   |
| <b>Deep vein</b>       | A blood clot in a deep vein in the body, usually <b>thrombosis</b> (see below) ( <b>DVT</b> ) in the leg.   |
| <b>Dietician</b>       | An expert on diet and nutrition.  |
| <b>District nurse</b>  | A nurse who visits people in their homes.   |
| <b>Dysarthria</b>      | Slurred speech, usually caused by weak face muscles.  |
| <b>Dysgraphia</b>      | Another word for <b>agraphia</b> (see above).   |
| <b>Dysphagia</b>       | Difficulty in swallowing.   |

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| <b>Dysphasia</b>                          | (see Aphasia)   |
| <b>Dyspraxia</b>                          | Another word for <b>apraxia</b> (see above)   |
| <b>Early supported discharge</b>          | When someone who has had a stroke is discharged from hospital to their own home, coordinated by a team of therapists, nurses and a doctor. Specialist stroke rehabilitation is then provided in their home. |
| <b>Echocardiogram</b>                     | A type of ultrasound scan used to look at the heart and nearby blood vessels.   |
| <b>Embolism</b>                           | When a blood clot moves, often to a blood vessel, and causes a blockage.  |
| <b>Emotional lability or emotionalism</b> | Some people find it hard to control their emotions after a stroke. It means they could laugh or cry uncontrollably, sometimes for no reason.  |
| <b>Endarterectomy</b>                     | Surgery to remove obstructions (usually fatty tissue or blood clot) from inside an artery.  |
| <b>Extra care housing</b>                 | A type of housing and care, somewhere between sheltered housing and a more traditional residential care home.   |
| <b>Financial assessment</b>               | Looking at information about a person's finances to help work out what support they could get, or what costs they might need to pay.  |
| <b>Fluoroscopy</b>                        | An X-ray imaging technique that can study moving body parts.  |

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| <b>Home care assistant</b>       | A paid carer who goes into someone's home to provide practical help and care.   |
| <b>Home care</b>                 | An agency that provides a home care service.  |
| <b>Hospital discharge</b>        | When someone is ready to go home from hospital. The discharge process should create a plan to make sure a stroke survivor gets all the support they need after leaving hospital. The patient, family and carers can be involved in planning the discharge.    |
| <b>Hypertension</b>              | High blood pressure.  |
| <b>Hypotension</b>               | Low blood pressure.   |
| <b>Incontinence</b>              | When someone can't control movements of their bowel or bladder.   |
| <b>Infarction</b>                | When the blood supply is stopped from getting to an area of tissue, causing the tissue to die.  |
| <b>Intermediate care teams</b>   | Teams, including health and social care professionals, who provide short-term support for people, either in a residential setting or in their own home. They help people become more independent, often after a period of illness or after being in hospital. |
| <b>Intracerebral haemorrhage</b> | A bleed inside the brain.   |

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| <b>Ischaemia</b>               | Where the blood supply to a certain part of the body isn't good enough and causes symptoms. For example in 'retinal ischaemia' lack of blood flow to the back of the eyes (retina) causes problems with vision. |
| <b>Lacunar infarct</b>         | A form of stroke caused by damage to small blood vessels deep within the brain.   |
| <b>Middle cerebral artery</b>  | The main blood vessels that supply each side of the brain.  |
| <b>MRI scan</b>                | A scan using magnetic fields to produce detailed images of the inside of the body.  |
| <b>Multi-disciplinary team</b> | People with different roles, such as doctors, social workers and therapists, working together as part of a team to care for a patient.  |
| <b>Myocardial infarction</b>   | The medical term for a heart attack.  |
| <b>Neuroplasticity</b>         | The brain's ability to recover after permanent damage. Brain cells can't grow back, but other parts of the brain can take on the function of the damaged area.  |
| <b>Nursing home</b>            | A care home that has trained nursing staff to look after people who need regular nursing care.  |
| <b>Occupational therapist</b>  | A health professional who helps people re-learn everyday skills, like dressing and getting around.  |



**One-sided (spatial) neglect**

Not being aware of things on one side.

**Personal care**

How someone looks after themselves, such as washing, dressing, bathing and going to the toilet.

**Physiotherapist**

A health professional who helps people strengthen their muscles, and improve their mobility, balance and coordination.

**Platelets**

Small blood cells that can stick together to form a clot.

**Psychiatrist**

A medically qualified doctor specialising in mental health.

**Psychologist**

Someone who studies and treats emotional and cognitive problems.

**Pulmonary embolism**

A blood clot in the lungs.

**Rehabilitation**

Help to restore someone to health or normal life, as far as possible, through training and therapy. Rehabilitation is also about helping people adapt to a disability.

**Residential care**

Long-term care given to someone who stays in a residential setting rather than in their own home.

**Respite break**

When someone goes to a day centre or to a care home for a short time, to allow their carer to have a break from looking after them.

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| <b>Risk assessment</b>                      | The assessment of any potential dangers in someone's home, work or other environment.  |
| <b>Safeguarding</b>                         | The process of responding to concerns that a vulnerable person is being, or is at risk of being, abused, neglected or exploited.                                 |
| <b>Sheltered accommodation</b>              | A complex of flats where there is often a warden and a communal room.  |
| <b>Sitting service</b>                      | A paid carer who stays with someone to allow their regular carer to have a break or go out.  |
| <b>Speech and language therapist (SaLT)</b> | A therapist who works with people to help improve speech. They can also help with eating and drinking.   |
| <b>Statins</b>                              | A group of medicines that can help lower the level of a type of cholesterol in the blood.  |
| <b>Stenosis</b>                             | A narrowing of a body passage or opening, such as an artery.   |
| <b>Stroke</b>                               | A stroke is a brain attack. It happens when the blood supply to part of the brain is cut off.  |
| <b>Subarachnoid haemorrhage</b>             | An uncommon type of stroke caused by bleeding on the surface of the brain.   |
| <b>Thrombectomy</b>                         | A procedure to remove a blood clot from the brain using a mechanical device, often a wire mesh tube (called a stent) inserted via a <b>catheter</b> (see above). |
| <b>Thrombosis</b>                           | A blood clot inside a blood vessel.  |

**Thrombolysis**

A drug that disperses a blood clot. In a stroke where a blood clot is causing a blockage, thrombolysis may be used to return the blood supply to the brain.

**Transient Ischaemic Attack (TIA, or mini-stroke)**

Sometimes called a mini-stroke, a TIA is the same as a stroke, except that symptoms last for a short amount of time. It can be a warning sign that a bigger stroke is on its way.

**Ultrasound**

An image of the inside of the body created using high-frequency sound waves.

**Vertebral arteries**

These are the two arteries that travel up the back of the neck, supplying blood to the back of the brain.

**Warfarin**

A drug for thinning the blood and preventing clots forming.

**Just so you know...**

This information isn't meant to replace specialist professional advice.

We do everything we can to make sure the information we offer is accurate and up to date, but we know that things change.

If you have any concerns, or you're not sure what something means, please ask your doctor.

**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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