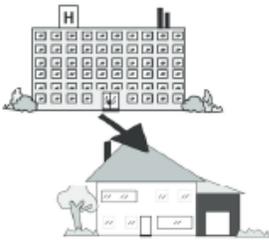


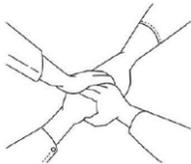
Going home after a stroke

You are getting ready to go home after having a stroke. Going home can be a time of uncertainty as you learn to navigate life after your stroke. Developing a plan and setting goals can help with this uncertainty. It is helpful to have someone to talk to about your stroke and to support you in working toward your goals. Your stroke team is here to help and we encourage you to ask questions and reach out when you need support.

This resource will help to prepare you to go home by answering the following questions:



1. How do I recover from my stroke?
2. How do I stay safe at home after a stroke?
3. How do I manage my medications after discharge home?
4. What follow-up tests and appointments can I expect?
5. How do I return to my life after stroke?
6. Who do I call if I have questions about my stroke?

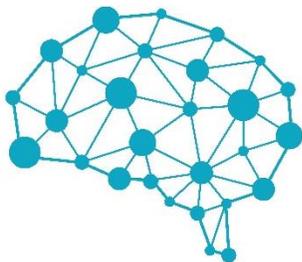


We encourage you to ask questions about the information contained in this booklet prior to your hospital discharge.

How do I recover from a stroke?

A stroke is an injury to a part of the brain. The effects of the stroke depend on the type of stroke, where the injury occurred and how much of the brain was affected. The effects can be physical, mental and emotional. The recovery process after stroke is different for each person.

Go to the "What is a Stroke?" section of your Stroke Care Binder for more information.



Over time, the part of the brain that is not injured can learn to take over some of the functions of the injured area. This re-learning process takes time, energy and repetition. As your brain is re-learning, you may become tired easily. If you become tired take a break and try the activity again when you have more energy.

Depending on the effects of your stroke, you may require rehabilitation therapy. Rehabilitation can take place either as an outpatient or at home. Some patients do not need any formal rehabilitation services after discharge from hospital. Talk to your stroke team about your stroke recovery prior to discharge from hospital.

**Everybody recovers from stroke differently in their own time.
It often takes longer to start adapting to the effects of your
stroke than you expect.**

Fatigue after stroke



Post-stroke fatigue is a sense of intense tiredness that does not get better with sleep. You may not feel tired in hospital but you may notice it when you get home.

Fatigue or feeling tired is one of the most common effects of a stroke and can range from mild to severe. It has been described as the most difficult or upsetting problem that people deal with after stroke. Recovering from your stroke takes a lot of energy. Feeling tired for a few weeks is normal. Talk to your stroke team or family doctor if you have any questions or concerns about fatigue.

Tips to help manage fatigue:

- Give yourself plenty of time to complete activities or tasks; the more you push yourself the worse you are likely to feel.
- Do not try to do all of the things that you used to do and at the same speed. Pace yourself – start off doing less for a while so that you may slowly and steadily attempt to build stamina.
- Take breaks before and after activities. Even tasks that do not require much energy can make you feel tired such as riding in a car or eating a meal.
- Try not to push yourself if you are having a better day. You may feel exhausted the next day or longer.
- Listen to your body; rest during the day if you need to.
- Maintain some level of exercise. Go for a short walk or use a stationary bike for a few minutes. Being active may help improve fatigue.
- Make healthy food choices.
- If you are able to return to work after stroke, it may be helpful to start with less hours at first. Slowly build up to your regular work schedule as tolerated.

Emotional Changes After Stroke



A stroke can change the way a person behaves and feels. You may not notice these changes as much as the physical changes of the stroke. These changes are normal after a major life event or illness. You may have feelings of anxiety, anger or depression. The stroke may affect your emotions and your ability to control them. Talk to your care partner, your stroke team or family doctor if you are having changes to your mood or have questions or concerns about your emotions. Information, support and management strategies are available.

Changes in Thinking After Stroke

A stroke can change the way a person thinks. You might not notice these changes while you are in hospital but you might notice subtle difference in your thinking after discharge.

Some of the changes you might see after you go home are:

- Difficulty concentrating
- Short attention span
- Needing more time to think and respond during conversations
- Being easily distracted
- Forgetfulness or not being able to recall information

There are a number of strategies that can help with these changes in thinking. Talk to your stroke team if you have questions or concerns.

Go to the “Community Resources” section of the Stroke Care Binder for more information.

How do I stay safe at home?



The stroke team will assess if you need help with your daily personal care tasks such as bathing or dressing after you go home from hospital and will put supports in place if required. If you are concerned with how you will manage your daily activities at home, talk with your stroke team. It is normal to need support as you adapt in your stroke recovery.



After a stroke, you may find you are at a higher risk of falls due to changes in leg strength, balance and coordination. It is important to consider ways to keep yourself safe and prevent injury at home. Talk with your stroke team before you leave the hospital if you have any questions about ways to keep safe in your home.

How do I manage my medications after discharge home?

After a stroke, medications may help lower your risk of having another stroke. You may need medications to:



- Help prevent blood clots
- Lower your blood pressure
- Lower your cholesterol
- Manage your diabetes
- Help slow your heart rate and restore the normal rhythm

You will receive a prescription from your stroke team for the initial supply of your medications. When you see your family doctor or nurse practitioner, ask for your prescriptions to be re-filled.

It is important you understand why you are taking your medications, how to take your medications and any potential side effects. It is important to take your medications as ordered by the doctor or nurse practitioner.

Go to the “Medications and Tests” section of your Stroke Care Binder for more information.

“Meds in Hand” Program at the Hamilton General Hospital



The Hamilton General Hospital Outpatient Pharmacy “Meds in Hand” program can fill your initial prescription before you leave the hospital. This service is run by the outpatient pharmacy on the main floor of the hospital. If you are interested in this service, ask your stroke team prior to discharge.

In addition to dispensing your medication, this program provides free:

- In person education about your medications
- Blister packs to assist with organizing your medication (if requested)
- Transfer of information to your preferred community pharmacy for future re-fills
- Review of medications you were on at home compared to your new prescriptions

What follow-up tests and appointments can I expect?

Stroke Team

Before you leave the hospital, you should receive a date for the following appointments:

- Stroke Unit Nurse Practitioner 905-521-2100 x 44174 (Telephone)
- Stroke Prevention Clinic 905-521-2100 x 44713
 - Stroke Clinic Nurse (Telephone or in person)
 - Neurologist who saw you in hospital (Telephone or in person)

*If you did not receive this information, ask your nurse before you leave the hospital or call the numbers listed.

Family Doctor

Contact your family doctor to book an appointment to discuss your hospital stay, review strategies for reducing your risk of stroke and arrange any follow-up required.

If you do not have a family doctor please speak to your stroke team or visit <https://www.ontario.ca/page/find-family-doctor-or-nurse-practitioner> or call 1-800-445-1822.

Stroke Rehabilitation and Home Support

If you were referred for ongoing services, you will be called at home by:

- Outpatient Rehabilitation Services at Hamilton Health Sciences within 1 week after discharge, 905-521-2100 x 40834
- In-home LHIN community support service within 48 hours after being discharged, 1-800-810-0000

If you did not receive a call within the time noted above or have questions, please call the numbers listed.

If you were not referred to the LHIN in-home service and feel you could benefit from this service you can self-refer by calling the number listed.

Follow-up diagnostic appointments

After discharge from the hospital, you may have additional follow-up diagnostic tests. If you require additional follow-up tests, the healthcare team will book the tests before you are discharged home. If the doctor ordered further cardiac monitoring, the monitoring device should arrive within 1 – 2 weeks after discharge. You will receive a call 24 – 48 hours after leaving hospital to arrange delivery of the monitoring device.

Community Resources

If you are looking for community resources that are available to persons after stroke or you need assistance navigating these resources, call the March of Dimes/Stroke Recovery Canada Hotline at 1-888-540-6666.

Go to the “Community Resources” section of the Stroke Care Binder for more information.

How do I return to my life after stroke?

Driving After a Stroke



In Ontario, your doctor must report to the Ministry of Transportation (MTO) that you had a stroke. This is because it might be dangerous for you to drive a car.

The rules in Ontario are:

- You cannot drive for at least one month
- Your doctor or nurse practitioner **MUST** assess your readiness to return to driving
- If your doctor or nurse practitioner is not sure if you are ready to drive, you may need to go to a special driving centre for more testing
- After assessment, your family doctor or nurse practitioner may determine you can return to driving if you have no major changes in:
 - your vision
 - your physical skills
 - your thinking such as problem solving or judgment
- The process to return to driving, if appropriate, may take several months

It is illegal to drive with a suspended licence

You can check with the MTO to determine the status of your license by either calling the Driver Medical Review Office at 1-800-268-1481 or checking the link: <https://www.dlc.rus.mto.gov.on.ca/dlc/enter-details>

You can contact the Driver Medical Review Office to request that the neurological condition form be sent to you via mail for your stroke doctor or family doctor to complete. The MTO requires this form to re-instate your license.

If you require assistance getting to appointments or getting groceries or medications while you cannot drive, speak with the stroke team before discharge. Services are available to assist with transportation and may require an application.

Go to the “Community Resources” section of your Stroke Care Binder for more information.

Return to Work and Financial Supports



A successful return to work starts with understanding how the effects of your stroke may impact you at work. Speak with a member of your stroke team or family doctor if you have questions about when and how to return to work safely.

Speak to a member of the stroke team before leaving hospital, if any of the following apply to you:

- You require medical clearance for work
- You are unable to return to work
- You require financial assistance
- You require assistance completing paperwork related to your stroke
- You have questions or concerns about the cost of your medications or devices for your stroke
- Your caregiver is unable to return to work or requires financial assistance

You may be eligible for financial support from your work or the government and it is easier to complete this paperwork prior to discharge from hospital.

Go to the “Community Resources” section of the Stroke Care Binder for more information.

Relationships



Having support after stroke is important for your health and recovery. It can reduce your stress and improve your overall wellbeing.

It can be difficult to connect with people after a stroke. A stroke may affect your confidence and make you want to avoid certain social situations. If you find it hard to connect with other people, talk to your support system, family doctor or stroke team about what you are feeling.

The person who has had the stroke needs to focus on recovery and others in the home may need to take on extra roles and responsibilities such as child care, making meals or doing household chores.

Many individuals with stroke have said that it helps to talk to others who have experienced a stroke. Peer support and other post-stroke programs are available for you and your support system.

Go to the “Community Resources” section of the Stroke Care Binder for more information.

Sex and Intimacy



It is up to each person to decide when to return to having sex. After a stroke, you may experience changes that can affect your sexual relationships and intimacy.

Some of these changes include:

- Fatigue, depression, fear
- Lost feeling on one side of your body
- Difficulty communicating with your partner
- Changes related to obtaining an erection
 - If you have used medication in the past, please talk to your doctor prior to re-starting.
- Changes related to vaginal dryness
 - Water-based lubricating jelly is okay. Avoid lubricants such as oils or petroleum jelly because they can lead to infection in your vagina.

Who do I call if I have questions about my stroke?

Stroke Unit Nurse Practitioner - Gillian Maguire
905-521-2100 x 44174

Stroke Prevention Clinic
905-521-2100 x 44713

If you experience any new sudden onset symptoms of stroke,
Call 911.

Learn the signs of stroke

Face is it drooping?
Arms can you raise both?
Speech is it slurred or jumbled?
Time to call 9-1-1 right away.

Act **F A S T** because the quicker
you act, the more of the person you save.

© Heart and Stroke Foundation of Canada, 2017