

# Depression and anxiety after stroke

## What you need to know

- › Depression and anxiety are common after a stroke.
- › Survivors of stroke, family members and carers can all get depression and anxiety.
- › Don't ignore depression or anxiety. There are things you can do that will help. You can get treatment.
- › Talk with your doctor about how you are feeling. Talk with family and friends too.
- › Information and support are available for people helping a family member or friend.

## About depression

These are symptoms of depression. You may have depression if you have some of these, on most days, for more than two weeks. You may:

- › Feel sad or down.
- › Lose interest in things you enjoy.
- › Feel irritable, overwhelmed, empty or numb.
- › Feel tired all the time.
- › Find it hard to concentrate.
- › Not feel like eating, or eat more than usual.
- › Find it hard to sleep or sleep more than usual.

## About anxiety

These are symptoms of anxiety. You may have anxiety if you have some of these, on most days, for more than two weeks. You may:

- › Feel very worried or anxious most of the time.
- › Find it hard to calm down.
- › Overthink things.
- › Find it hard to make decisions.

- › Feel tired all the time.
- › Have trouble concentrating.
- › Have tense muscles.
- › Find it hard to get to sleep or stay asleep.

## Depression, anxiety and stroke

It's normal to have a lot of different feelings after a stroke. Talk with your doctor, family and friends about how you are feeling.

Depression and anxiety are different. They are health problems. Depression and anxiety stop you feeling like yourself.

One in two survivors of stroke will get depression. One in four survivors will get anxiety. Depression and anxiety can happen at any time after a stroke.

For survivors, it's more likely you'll get depression or anxiety if you:

- › Have had depression or anxiety before.
- › Have trouble communicating.
- › Had a severe stroke.
- › Have trouble doing everyday tasks.
- › Are less independent since your stroke.

If you're a family member or carer, you can get depression and anxiety too. Talk with your doctor, family and friends about how you are feeling.

## Suicidal thoughts

Talk with your doctor if you are having thoughts about hurting yourself or suicide. Let family and friends know. Help is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Read the Get Help section.

## Treatment and support

### Talk with your doctor

Your doctor will work with you to find the best treatment for you. Your doctor can:

- › Make a diagnosis.
- › Check for other health problems or medicines that may be contributing.
- › Tell you about things you can do that will help.
- › Refer you to a mental health professional.
- › Prepare a Mental Health Treatment Plan – this gives you a Medicare rebate for therapy.
- › Give you medicine.

### Things you can do

- › Move more throughout your day. Exercise regularly.
- › Eat well and avoid alcohol.
- › Do activities you enjoy.
- › Spend time with people who make you feel good.
- › Share how you're feeling with family and friends.
- › Talk with other survivors, family members and carers about depression and anxiety.

If you need help doing these things, talk with your doctor. Allied health professionals like psychologists, physiotherapists and dietitians can help.

StrokeLine can help you connect with others survivors, family members and carers. Read the Get Help section to find out about StrokeLine.

### Therapy

Effective therapies include:

- › Cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT).
- › Interpersonal therapy (IPT).
- › Mindfulness based cognitive therapy (MBCT).

If you have a Mental Health Treatment Plan, check how much the gap payment is when you make an appointment. If cost is an issue, talk with your doctor. StrokeLine can tell you about low or no cost options.

Your doctor may recommend a mental health professional. You can also find someone you'd like to see.

Visit their website, and call or email them before you make an appointment. You may need to see a few different mental health professionals to find the best one for you.

### Medicines

Antidepressant medicine can effectively treat moderate to severe depression, and some anxiety disorders. If you are prescribed medicine, it will take time to work. The first medicine prescribed may not be the best one for you.

Never stop taking your medicines or change your dose without talking with your doctor.

### Helping someone with depression or anxiety

Help from family and friends makes a big difference to someone with depression and anxiety. Beyond Blue has information and resources to help you help others, as well as look after yourself. StrokeLine can support you and tell you about helpful services.

### Get help

**StrokeLine.** StrokeLine's nursing and allied health professionals can give you information, advice and support. StrokeLine is a free, confidential and practical service.

Open Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm Australian Eastern Time. StrokeLine is closed on national public holidays.

**1800 787 653**

Email [strokeline@strokefoundation.org.au](mailto:strokeline@strokefoundation.org.au)

**Beyond Blue.** (24 hours a day, 7 days a week). Help for people with depression and anxiety, their families, carers and friends.

**1300 22 4636 [beyondblue.org.au](http://beyondblue.org.au)**

**Lifeline.** (24 hours a day, 7 days a week). Help for people who are very upset, in a crisis or thinking about suicide or hurting themselves.

**13 11 14 [lifeline.org.au](http://lifeline.org.au)**

**13YARN** (24 hours a day, 7 days a week). Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders crisis support line.

**13 92 76 [13YARN.org.au](http://13YARN.org.au)**

Visit [psychology.org.au](http://psychology.org.au) for help finding a psychologist.

### About us

Stroke Foundation partners with the community to prevent, treat and beat stroke. We do this through raising awareness, facilitating research and supporting survivors of stroke.

### Contact us

 **StrokeLine 1800 787 653**

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