

Emotional and Behavioral Changes After Stroke

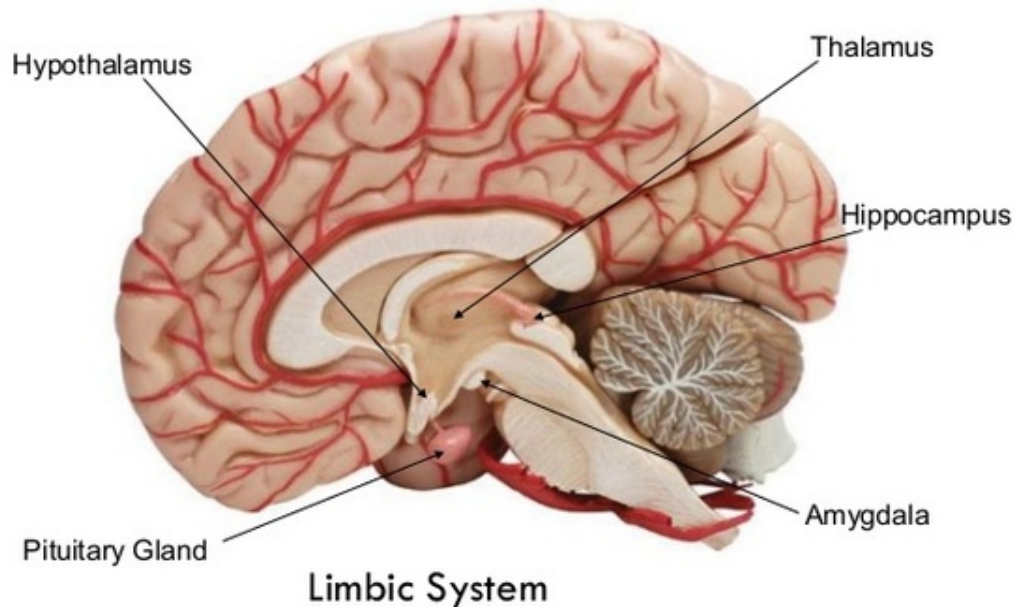
For those that have been affected with stroke, the world is different, confusing and overwhelming. It's difficult to understand all the changes that have happened. A survivor may have trouble understanding why they need treatment. So many questions will be asked, and many will go unanswered. As time progresses, feelings of anger, depression, anxiety and denial will set in. Those with stroke may no longer be able to make their own choices about what they want to do, and freedom will be lost. Many of these emotions will be taken out on loved ones and caregivers. It is important to understand what the survivor is going through and to get help from a professional to ease these feelings of helplessness.

Anxiety & Depression after Stroke

We all deal with anxiety on some level, and it is a natural human response. Our brain will need to find a way to cope with anxiety and stressors, however, stroke survivors may not have the capability and anxiety can be overwhelming for a survivor.

Several parts of the brain are key factors in the production of fear and anxiety. The amygdala and the hippocampus, which are part of our limbic system and closer to our frontal lobe, showcase major roles in our coping skills of anxiety and depression. The amygdala is responsible for forming and storing information related to long term memory and helps discern when there is danger or anything frightening. When damage occurs to this area, a survivor will have difficulty controlling anxiety, depression, fear, gloom, learning and remembering.

Brain of Emotions



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Anxiety can happen in different ways. Some of the common symptoms are hot and cold flashes, a racing heart, tightening of the chest, obsessive thinking and compulsive behavior.

One of the ways to help a survivor when they are going through these feelings is:

- Talk calm and in a gentle tone.
- Try and distract the person by taking their attention away from what is causing anger or frustration.
- Give the person something different to do

Please always keep in mind that a survivor is not fully responsible for their anger or behavior. Many people with a stroke will have difficulty waiting and are restless. They can be easily irritable and frustrated. At times they will use unacceptable language. Stay patient and support the person as best as you.

Often times, depression will set in for a stroke survivor once they realize that their life has physically and emotionally changed. People with a speech disorder such as Apraxia and Aphasia will have difficulty communicating their feelings which can cause sadness. Depression as well as anxiety can hinder recovery, so survivors and caregivers should seek professional help.



Self-Awareness

Those with stroke are often not aware of changes in their physical abilities, thinking or emotions. These people have trouble with self-awareness. They do not understand the need to work on their recovery. They feel that they are the same before their brain injury. Since they do not have the same understanding as most, they will not know why treatment is needed for them. They will feel they are being forced to do activities they do not want to do which can cause fear and anger. It will be important to help guide your loved ones gently through these feelings and seek professional help.

Memory Problems

Some people with a stroke may have memory problems. They may have short or long term memory loss and will look at you questioning what you are asking them. Short term memory, the new learning, is the most common form of memory loss.

A few ways you can assist your loved one with their memory loss is:

- Make a book of your loved ones photo memories and review often
- Have them write down activities that they have done during the day and review at night
- Repetition is key. Have them repeat out loud new information that is being learned
- Give them hints first rather than the answer