

What is social support?

Social support is the physical and emotional comfort we get from our family, friends, and the community. Feeling that we are a valued part of the lives of others is important to everyone's sense of well-being. Social support plays an important role in how we react to and recover from stressful life events, including a stroke.

There are many different forms of social support. As you recover from a stroke, you can get social support from your loved ones and from stroke support groups, where you can learn from people who are going through the same recovery you are. The social support we receive from others can be divided into a few main types:

- **Emotional support:** people telling us that they care about us, that we are important to them, and listening to our emotional concerns
- **Informational support:** when we get helpful information from people we know
- **Sharing points of view:** when other people share with us how they have coped with a similar situation, or offer their own perspective on a problem
- **Feedback:** information about us that we feel is honest and intended to help
- **Functional help:** physical or organizational help in performing the tasks of everyday life, such as helping us get dressed or prepare food, or providing transportation

How does social support affect my recovery?

Social support is an important part of your stroke recovery. Many research studies have found that the more social support a stroke survivor has, the better the chances of recovering physically and mentally after a stroke, and the faster he or she can regain their independence.

One study of 313 stroke survivors found that those with better family support were able to be released from the hospital sooner and were more likely to go home instead of to a long-term care facility.¹ In one study of 46 patients (including 20 women) followed for 6 months, those who suffered a severe stroke but who had good social support scored 65% higher on a test of mobility and ability to perform daily tasks and improved the most over the course of their recovery, compared with patients who got less social support.² Several other small

studies have had similar results.

3-5

All stroke survivors do better with good social support. Survivors who have had more severe strokes and more functional problems gain the most benefit from the support of family and friends, especially functional help early in their recovery. Because women tend to have worse physical and mental problems after a stroke, functional and emotional support is an especially important part of the recovery of female stroke survivors.

How do I involve my family and friends in my recovery and rehabilitation?

Socializing with your family and friends is an important part of your stroke recovery. Your family and friends should be your first line of support as you work on recovering and putting your life back together after a stroke.

Family involvement in your stroke recovery becomes especially important after you are released from the hospital and continue your recovery process at home. You should try to involve your loved ones early in your stroke rehabilitation so that they can better understand what you are going through and learn how they can help; bringing a family member to a rehabilitation session can make both of your lives easier as you learn to cope with the aftermath of your stroke. [Speech and language therapy](#) can be especially helpful for family members of survivors who have communication problems because of the stroke. Family members can also help support your exercises and daily stroke therapy plan.

After a stroke, many survivors become depressed and withdraw from social situations and the company of loved ones, depriving them of support when they need it most. Women are more likely than men to be depressed and to reduce their social activity after a stroke.⁶ It is important that your family and friends continue to involve you in recreational activities and arrange for you to attend social gatherings.

You should resolve to communicate honestly about your needs during recovery and what your family can do to help. It is important to do as much as possible for yourself as you relearn skills and adjust to the limitations caused by your stroke, and you can ease the stress on yourself and

your loved ones by making it clear when you need their help and when you prefer to do things on your own.

Family members can also participate in your stroke recovery by making sure you follow your treatment plan, such as encouraging you to quit smoking or by having someone call to remind you to take your medications each day. They can also help by driving you to rehabilitation and doctor's appointments.

One helpful tip to ensure you feel the support of your family and friends when you need it most is by making a list of the phone numbers of your loved ones and putting it by the phone; any time you need help or someone to talk to, you'll know exactly who to call.

[Next: Finding a Stroke Support Group](#)

[SEO](#) by [AceSEF](#)