

Home Care Tips for Stroke Patients

When an elderly loved one has a stroke, they commonly suffer from one or more permanent mental or physical disabilities. Things they once did with ease can become extremely difficult or even impossible. When stroke patients return home, they often require a number of home modifications to help them regain as much of their independence as possible.

Home health care professionals often help patients return to their homes, teaching them how to live independently. The disabilities associated with stroke victims can vary widely from patient to patient. So each case must be taken on an individual basis. However, you may find some of the following tips useful, particularly if you will be working alongside professional home health providers to care for your loved one.



Making the Home Safer for a Stroke Patient

Mobility: Some patients will require the use of a wheelchair to get around. To accommodate wheelchair access, doorways may need to be widened to at least thirty-two inches. Patients using a wheelchair or a walker require doors that swing open easily. Make sure the hinges are well-lubricated on all doors, and shave the edges of doors that stick or get hung up on rugs or carpeting.

Doors: In some instances, you might find it best to remove doors altogether. This will generally make it easier to widen the doorway as well as keep your loved one from struggling with gripping doorknobs. Wherever doorknobs are required, consider changing from traditional rounded knobs to lever door handles. Levered doorknobs require less dexterity, because the patient can simply push down on the handle to get the door open.

Floors: Eliminate uneven flooring. Thresholds may need to be adjusted in order to prevent the patient from slipping or tripping and falling. For patients in wheelchairs, uneven floors can be difficult to navigate. Whenever possible, choose non-skid flooring and remove rugs and long-pile carpeting.

Walkways: All walkways in the home should be clear of clutter, furniture, cord, and wiring. The patient should wear non-slip shoes, and use a walker for stability. Handrails should be secured and placed throughout the house, especially by stairways.

Making the Bathroom Safer for Stroke Patients

To make the bathroom safer for patients, it is a good idea to purchase handrails for the tub, shower, and toilet areas. The bottom of the bathtub should contain some kind of no-slip covering, and a bath bench should be used for bathing. Other accommodations that may be more costly include the installation of special walk-in showers and tubs.

If you have questions about caring for your loved one after a stroke, speak with your relative's physician and home health providers for tips and advice.

Types of Strokes

There are generally two types of stroke: an **ischemic stroke** or a hemorrhagic stroke. An ischemic stroke occurs when a blood vessel in the brain becomes blocked due to a clot, and is more common in the elderly.

Hemorrhagic stroke happens when a blood vessel leaks or bursts in the brain due to either a blockage or a weak spot in the vessel. In both cases, the surrounding brain tissue becomes damaged and can die. There is no way to predict where or when a stroke may occur, and it is possible for multiple strokes to occur simultaneously.

Since strokes mainly targets the blood vessels, individuals with heart, blood or artery problems are more prone to the condition than others. This includes, but are not limited to, people with high blood pressure (hypertension), high cholesterol, heart disease, arteriole disease, diabetes and obesity. Individuals with a family history of such diseases are more susceptible than others. People who had past

transient ischemic attacks (TIA), also known as "mini strokes," also have a higher risk for a full-blown episode.

While certain uncontrollable risk factors, such as family history, age, gender and ethnicity, can make an individual more susceptible to stroke, there are still preventative steps and lifestyle changes a person can make to decrease his or her risk of having stroke. Normally, preventative measures that protect the heart, blood and arteries can also help prevent stroke. Incorporating an exercise routine and adopting a healthy, well-balanced diet low in sodium and sugar can help maintain a healthy weight. Cutting out cigarette smoking, excessive drinking and illegal drug use also helps keep stroke at bay.

If you have not already, then see your medical doctor today for your annual physical exam and blood test, and ask him or her about preventative measures to ward off this serious medical condition.

Prevention

Strokes can be unpredictable, as blood vessel blockages can occur without symptoms or warning signs. The severity of each episode depends on the extent of brain damage, as symptoms usually do not appear until the first signs of tissue death. Precautionary methods can certainly be taken to avoid risk factors, such as high blood pressure, high cholesterol, diabetes and heart disease. While these medical conditions happen partly due to genetics, modifications in diet and lifestyle can still decrease one's susceptibility to strokes.

See Your Doctor

Medical professionals recommend undergoing annual physical exams as a preventative measure for all possible medical conditions. During your checkup, a doctor will ask a series of questions regarding diet and lifestyle habits. These questions can help the physician determine whether such factors can place the patient at risk for problems later in life, since chronic conditions usually develop as a consequence of years of unhealthy lifestyle choices. Usually, routine blood tests are run as part of the physical to screen cholesterol and glucose levels, and it is

important follow up and discuss the test results with the doctor, so he or she can give appropriate health advice and tips to help correct unhealthy behaviors that may increase the susceptibility to stroke.

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