



Right-Brain vs. Left-Brain Strokes

Behavior and Coping Strategies

Right-brain stroke survivors experience:

Emotional highs and lows and involuntary episodes of excessive crying and/or laughing. These are often manageable with medications.

- ▶ Interrupt the behavior with distractions.
- ▶ Change the subject or speak the survivor's name.
- ▶ Continue conversation; ignore display of emotion.
- ▶ Watch for fatigue and encourage rest periods.

Short attention spans including distractions and loss of concentration

- ▶ Ensure a quiet environment. Turn off TVs and radios; unplug phone.
- ▶ Divide tasks into steps.
- ▶ Encourage survivor to slow down and go step-by-step.
- ▶ Supervise projects that could be harmful if distracted such as cooking or ironing.
- ▶ Install chime on door to sound an alert if the survivor leaves the house.

Poor judgment, especially for his or her own safety and impulsiveness

- ▶ Don't over- or underestimate the survivor's abilities.
- ▶ Stay with survivor and monitor activity.
- ▶ Keep survivor's environment safe. Arrange it to alleviate visual or sensory problems.

Confusion and memory loss

- ▶ Write step-by-step directions for tasks like dressing, laundry or making a sandwich.
- ▶ Set fixed schedules if possible for meals, routine events like church and dinner out.
- ▶ Give new information a little at a time, slowly; give survivor time to process it.
- ▶ Offer memory aids such as calendars, appointment books, Post-it notes and pictures of where things are located.
- ▶ Do not point out the survivor's memory problems.

Spatial-perceptual issues (neglect of left side/survivor is unaware he or she has a left side)

- ▶ Place items the survivor needs on the right side to be seen. For example, turn dinner plate so all food is seen and eaten.
- ▶ Provide reminders of the left side by touching, rubbing and massaging it.
- ▶ Encourage survivor to scan (turn head side to side) to see what is ignored on the affected side.

Behavior and Coping Strategies

Left-brain stroke survivors experience:

Cautious or compulsive behavior

- ▶ Offer encouragement and positive feedback phrases such as *keep going, good, that's right*.
- ▶ Develop a cadence to allow survivor to work or function at a comfortable pace.
- ▶ Watch for fatigue; encourage survivor to ask for help with daily tasks without guilt.

Apraxia (difficulty translating ideas or performing function into action)

- ▶ Give short phrase instructions geared to achieving the goal such as, "Come to the kitchen."
- ▶ See if the survivor can sing the answer. Singing uses many areas of the brain undamaged by the stroke.
- ▶ Use carrier phrases the survivor can complete like, "You want a ____."

Aphasia (difficulty speaking [expressive] or understanding what is being said [receptive])

- ▶ Be patient; give the survivor time to respond to questions or comments.
- ▶ Keep questions simple so the survivor is encouraged to answer with short, yes or no replies.
- ▶ Encourage survivor to point to objects or make gestures to show what he or she wants.
- ▶ Use a word or picture board.
- ▶ Speak clearly and concisely; use one idea at a time.

Posterior stroke survivors experience:

Lack of coordination or swallowing problems

- ▶ Remove throw rugs to deter tripping.
- ▶ Install grab bars in bathrooms and hand rails around the house.
- ▶ Have a walker available.

Swallowing problems

- ▶ Continue diet prescribed in the hospital until the speech therapist changes it.
- ▶ Encourage the survivor to continue liquid thickener to avoid choking.
- ▶ Purée favorite foods.

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