

Safe at Home



Eliminate risks for injury in the home to prolong health and independence. Use this checklist of safety precautions to eliminate some of the most common dangers for accidents at home.

- Use a pill organizer to keep track of daily medications, or keep a daily pill journal.
- Remove throw rugs from walkways. Always pick your feet up when walking.
- Use a cooking timer, especially if you leave the kitchen while the stove/oven is on.
- Keep all flammable items away from the stove/oven, including shirt sleeves and towels.
- Place frequently used items within easy reach by rearranging shelves and counters.
- Take your time getting in or out of the tub or shower. Use a non-skid bath mat.
- Keep phones and emergency numbers in every room of the house, and by your bed.
- Keep the house brightly lit: use the right wattage bulbs and nightlights.
- If you live alone, stay in contact with a neighbor or relative on a daily basis.
- Call your physician if you do not feel well or if you have questions about medications.
- If you use a walker, do not carry items—use a rolling cart, walker basket or bag.
- Never stand on a chair, box or other unstable object to reach something.
- Never put anything on the stairway. Take your time on the stairs.

This handout was adapted from information supplied by Tim Mancino, OTR/L, and from the Consumer Product Safety Commission. The CPSC's website contains an extensive home safety checklist at <http://www.cpsc.gov/>

Surviving Stroke's Effects



More than 700,000 people in the United States sustain a stroke annually, according to the American Heart Association. If you're one of them, rehabilitation is an important part of your recovery. Keep in mind, though, that it's hard work. Tasks that were easy to do before your stroke will be more difficult. But they are possible. The following are tips on dealing with obstacles you'll probably face during recovery.

GETTING DRESSED

A stroke often affects movement and use of one side of your body, which makes getting dressed difficult. Assistive devices, such as stocking/sock spreaders, rings attached to zipper pulls and buttonhooks can help. Clothing also may be easier to handle if it features elastic fasteners, elastic waistbands, snaps and grippers, and elastic shoelaces. In addition to using these devices, you should:

- Lay out your clothes in the order you'll put them on, placing those you plan to put on first on top.
- Sit down while you dress to prevent falls.
- Clothing first; to undress, remove the stronger arm or leg from clothing first.

BODY AWARENESS

After a stroke, some people have problems with body awareness. For instance, people with right-sided paralysis may forget about the right side of their body. To avoid this:

• Make an effort to look at, move and touch your affected side.

• Ask your friends and family to sit next to your affected side when they talk to you. Also ask them to pass your food from that side.

- *Some people, especially those who don't* have feelings in an arm or leg, have trouble recognizing body parts on their affected side. If you do, ask someone to question you about that side. For example, they can say, "show me your right hand," or "Where am I touching you?"

SPEECH ISSUES

Some people develop speech and language problems after a stroke, especially if it affects their right side. These problems may involve and/or all aspects of language, such as speaking, reading, writing and understanding spoken words. Tips for dealing with speech and language problems include:

• Ask people to speak directly to you using short, simple sentences.

• To help you understand them, ask people to use gestures, point or write notes.

• When people speak to you, watch their lips move.

- If weak face muscles cause you slur words, ask your doctor about speech therapy.
- If other people have trouble understanding your words, ask them to tell you when they don't understand

BLADDER CONTROL

About half of all stroke survivors experience urinary incontinence. Causes include infection, constipation and the effects of medications. If you have problems controlling your bladder, ask your doctor to:

- Help you develop a schedule of regular bathroom use

• Educate you about protective clothing or pads

• Discuss preventive medications, such as anticholinergics or antispasmodics.

• Other methods to prevent bladder leakage include emptying your bladder at regular intervals and controlling your liquid intake.

EATING NORMALLY

Many people have difficulty swallowing after having a stroke, which increases the risk of choking. If a swallowing is hard or you sometimes choke, tell your doctor. You may need further tests or therapy.

Following are more tips for eating after a stroke:

• Eat foods that smell good. Aromatic, sweet or salty foods stimulate the production of saliva in your mouth, which will help you swallow.

• Try drinking juice if you have trouble swallowing water. The taste of juice helps you know that liquid is in your mouth, so you're less likely to choke. But don't drink citrus juices, such as orange juice. It can be irritating and may have pulp, which could increase your chances of choking.

• Eat foods at room temperature because you may be oversensitive to hot or cold.

• Avoid sticky foods, such as peanut butter, syrup and bananas; they can be hard to swallow.

• Avoid dry foods that are hard to swallow, such as crackers, rice, popcorn and toast.

Besides choking, many people who have had a stroke may find it difficult to use a knife and fork. Talk to your nurse or therapist about assistive devices, such as large-handled silverware, which can make eating easier.

Stroke can cause many difficulties. But with education, motivation and help of trained professionals, you can achieve independence. ■

Adapted from <http://content.health.msn.com:80/encyclopedia/article/3053.1196>