



Use Common Sense When Caring for a Stroke Survivor

According to the National Stroke Association, almost 80% of all U.S. families will be affected by stroke over the course of a lifetime. Nearly 500,000 Americans suffer a stroke or "brain attack" each year. Stroke is a cerebrovascular injury that occurs when blood flow to the brain is interrupted by a clogged or burst artery. Strokes represent the leading cause of disability among adults and the third leading cause of death in the U.S.

Approximately two-thirds of all strokes occur in people over the age of 65, and while strokes occur more often in men than in women, women are more likely to die following a stroke. Unfortunately, nearly one in five individuals who survive a stroke will have a second "brain attack" within a year.

Following a stroke, a person's vision, memory or speech skills may be impaired. Loss of control over one side of the body--whether temporary or permanent--is also common. There is a loss of skills that were previously taken for granted. Taking care of personal needs such as bathing, dressing or preparing a meal can be difficult, but it's more important to a stroke survivor's sense of well-being to continue functioning as independently as possible.

Caregivers and family members can help to enhance a stroke survivor's autonomy through creative adjustments in daily routines and the use of supportive devices. It's important for caregivers to make a few changes and make the home safer to help protect their loved ones from accidents and falls.

The simplest strategy is to remove common tripping hazards like throw rugs and electric or telephone wires. Because a stroke survivor's gait may be affected, caregivers also should remove any furniture that blocks passage ways and check the lighting throughout the house, especially in dark hallways, stairways, kitchens and bathrooms.

Bathing, dressing and grooming can represent a challenge. Traditional clothing often causes unforeseen problems for stroke survivors. Loose fitting clothing is stylish, comfortable and easier to get in and out of. Look for apparel that does not need to be pulled on over the head and that fastens in front. Velcro fasteners should replace buttons, zippers and shoelaces whenever possible.

Leisure activities should take on an added importance. In addition to the social benefits, hobbies provide an opportunity for stroke survivors to hone perceptual, problem-solving and organizational skills. Relearning these skills can be difficult, but the task is more enjoyable when it can be done while playing word games, checkers or chess or while helping family members with the shopping or cooking.

For additional information on care for stroke patients or specially designed product catalogs, contact your QUEST EAP Eldercare Specialist, Peggy McFarland at 800-253-9236.

