



RESCUE

Resources & Education for Stroke Caregivers'
Understanding & Empowerment

April 2009

www.rorc.research.va.gov/rescue

SEX AFTER STROKE



Stroke brings about many unexpected waves of change that are difficult to adjust to and may even be embarrassing to talk about, such as sex after stroke. Resuming a healthy intimate life is important, but it can also be a challenging part of the recovery process for the stroke survivor. It is important for the stroke survivor and their partner to be informed and equipped to face the changes in sexual activity and function that may follow a stroke.

The changes that affect how stroke survivors feel about sex and intimacy are emotional, physical and mental. Stroke survivors may experience difficulty having sex because of erectile dysfunction or vaginal dryness, immobility, incontinence, fatigue, side-effects of medicines, fear of another stroke, decreased libido, or depression.

Partners of stroke survivors are also faced with adapting to the changes in sex and intimacy. It is common for stroke survivor's partners to experience fear of causing relapse, lack of excitement, anguish, and even disgust towards sex. They may be uncomfortable with the change in physical appearance of the stroke survivor or have difficulty seeing their loved one as they did prior to the stroke.

Open communication about the changes between stroke survivor and their partner is important to reconnecting and rekindling the feelings of closeness. Even if a stroke survivor is unable to have intercourse, it is still possible to enjoy other sexual activities and intimacy. Open discussion about sex after a stroke between the stroke survivor, their partner, and the healthcare provider is an important part of a safe and healthy stroke recovery.

For more information on this topic please see Page 2 for: ["5 Common Questions Caregivers Have About Sex after Stroke"](#)

American Stroke Association

"Sexual issues are among the most important in recovery, but they can be the hardest for stroke survivors and their partners to discuss."

**The American Stroke Association has a free pamphlet:
"Sex After Stroke: Our Guide to Intimacy After Stroke"**

This free material covers facts about fears and concerns, timing for resuming sexual activity, special physical challenges, and alternative ways to make love.

To request this free pamphlet, visit:

[http://www.strokeassociation.org/presenter.jhtml?
identifier=9065](http://www.strokeassociation.org/presenter.jhtml?identifier=9065)

Read the full article on the Web:

<http://www.rorc.research.va.gov/rescue>

Did You Know?

- Female caregivers comprise about 2/3 of all unpaid (informal) caregivers in the U.S.
- Female caregivers report higher levels of depression, anxiety, and lower levels of subjective well-being, life satisfaction and physical health as compared to male caregivers.

Let caregivers know that there are many services available to help them, including:

- | | |
|--------------------------|------------------|
| - Home Health Services | - Respite Care |
| - Home Care Services | - Adult Day Care |
| - Meal Delivery Programs | - Senior Centers |

For more information, visit:

Family Caregiver Alliance—National Center on Caregiving
<http://www.caregiver.org>

Read the full article on the Web:

<http://www.rorc.research.va.gov/rescue>





RESCUE

5 COMMON QUESTIONS CAREGIVERS HAVE ABOUT SEX AFTER STROKE (BUT MAY BE AFRAID TO ASK)

- 1. Can my husband/wife and I still have sex?** Yes. There may be difficulties and adjustments that might need to be made, but sexual relations can usually continue after having a stroke. It is an important component for a healthy relationship.
- 2. Why has my partner's desire for sex decreased since the stroke?** In many instances, changes in sexual activity is linked to changes in role function of the stroke survivor and their partner. Immobility, cognitive impairment, and side effects from medication sometimes lead to a reduction in libido, arousal, or even orgasm in both men and women. Men may experience erectile dysfunction (ED) and concerns about sexual performance can also greatly reduce sexual interest.
- 3. Can I induce another stroke while having sex with my partner?** Though there is no strong evidence that engaging in sexual activity is likely to cause a stroke (it is very rare), a common fear among stroke survivors and their loved ones is that the exertion and excitement of sex may cause harm, or even induce another stroke. It may take a simple "Go ahead, you'll be fine" from the provider to eliminate the fear for both the stroke survivor and their partner.
- 4. What are the sexual consequences of stroke?** There are several issues following a stroke that may affect your partner, including: changes in self-perception (sexual attractiveness), diminished self-image and/or low self-esteem, fear of being rejected or abandoned, concerns about sexual failure, decreased libido, decreased coital frequency, decreased satisfaction with sexual life.
- 5. What can I do to adjust?** Understand that the stroke survivor will experience physical, mental and emotional changes following the stroke, and that it will take some time to adjust. Counseling is highly recommended to deal with these changes. Explore the many alternative ways to share closeness and intimacy. Your healthcare team may be able to suggest some treatments and other ways to improve your sexual relationship.

Read "Helpful Tips" for adjusting to sex after stroke in the full article on the Web:

<http://www.rorc.research.va.gov/rescue>

MY HEALTHEVET WELLNESS REMINDERS ARE LIVE!

My HealtheVet, www.myhealth.va.gov, the award-winning Personal Health Record for Veterans, released its latest online feature on March 25, 2009. **Wellness Reminders** will further assist Veterans in managing their health care online by putting the power of e -health care in their hands.



Read the full article on the Web: <http://www.rorc.research.va.gov/rescue>

Links in this Issue



RESCUE Web Site
Caregiver Project Abstract

VA My HealtheVet
American Stroke Association (ASA)

Family Caregiver Alliance -
National Center on Caregiving

<http://www.rorc.research.va.gov/rescue>
http://www.rorc.research.va.gov/projects/Project_Template.cfm?Project_ID=2141698796
<http://www.myhealth.va.gov>
<http://www.strokeassociation.org>
<http://www.strokeassociation.org/presenter.jhtml?identifier=9065>
<http://www.caregiver.org>
http://www.caregiver.org/caregiver/jsp/content_node.jsp?nodeid=1822

Citations Reference in this Newsletter can be found in the Web version: <http://www.rorc.research.va.gov/rescue>

<http://www.rorc.research.va.gov/rescue>



*Web-Based Informational Materials for Caregivers
of Veterans Post-Stroke*

Project Number SDP 06-327 funded by VA HSR&D
Quality Enhancement Research Initiative (QUERI)

Connie Uphold, Principal Investigator
Connie.Uphold@va.gov

RESCUE Newsletter Editorial Team:
Kristen Wing, Benjamin Lee,
Kimberly Findley, and Jini Hanjian
Graphic Design by Lindsay Knauff

