

Life after Stroke

Advice and Tips from Stroke Survivors



Making personal care easier

Managing medication

Health and physical activity

Dealing with fatigue

Chest
Heart &
Stroke



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The effects of a stroke can be life changing. I should know – I had a sudden stroke in 2022 when I was only in my forties.

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“I had a Thrombectomy, surgery to remove a blood clot, which saved my life but I was classed as having moderate to severe aphasia and dysphasia. I had speech therapy as well as physiotherapy and made good improvements, but I was out of routine, not working and I didn’t know what to do with myself and experienced a lot of anxiety. After you have a stroke, when you have any little pain or twitch, you think, is this another stroke? It was the lack of confidence that really affected me.”

“I went along to NICHS’s Post Rehab Exercise Programme, and it really helped. The team gave you that gentle push along or the tough love with a smile on their faces when you needed it. It gave you a reason to get out of bed in the morning. You were meeting people who have been through the same thing and are in the same boat. The follow up on a personal level was so important – to have people that were interested in you, in where you were at, the level of progress you were making, and where you could get to was so important. The NICHS team are bright, positive, and willing to listen.”

With warmest wishes,
Philip Annett

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NICHS works across Northern Ireland with people like Philip; people of all ages affected by stroke, alongside their families and carers. We are dedicated to supporting people in adjusting to life with a stroke condition, helping them to enjoy life to the full, re-engage with hobbies, and improve their confidence, independence, and overall quality of life. One of the most helpful ways people can do this is by hearing from other stroke survivors. That is why we have worked with our service users to create this leaflet and share their advice for adjusting to life after a stroke.

This leaflet has practical tips on things like making personal care easier, tackling household tasks, strategies for dealing with fatigue, and ways to cope with the mental impact of stroke, amongst much more. We hope you find it useful as you navigate life after your stroke.



**Scan to read more
stroke survivor stories.**



Personal Care



- “If you find putting shoes on difficult, buy slip on shoes or ones with Velcro fastenings. You can also adapt old shoes with elastic laces and using a shoehorn helps.”
- “Clothes with bigger buttons can be easier to manage.”
- “Earrings with a hook are easier to put on than those with earring posts. A watch with an elasticated strap is a good alternative to a watch with a buckle strap.”
- “Pullover or front fastening bras are easier to put on. Or take your bra to an alterations shop who might be able to sew it up by adding extra elastic which means it can be pulled over your head or up over your legs.”
- “Use a small hair dryer or a brush hair dryer to make styling your hair easier.”
- “Put your clothes on your effected side first.”
- “Put a lace or ring through zips to help pull them up.”
- “Choose clothes that are easier to get on and off such as elasticated trousers and pull-on tops without lots of buttons.”
- “Wear a bikini or swimming trunks in the shower if you need help and feel a bit uncomfortable about this.”
- “Sitting down to get dressed can be easier than trying to do it standing up.”



Medication



- “Get to grips with your medications. Know what you are on and why and if there is anything you should avoid doing when taking certain medications.”
- “Ask your pharmacist to put your tablets into a weekly pill box organiser. It helps make sure you take your tablets regularly and on time and you won't have the bother of opening bottles and remembering to take your medication.”
- “There can be side effects associated with some common post stroke medications so get advice from your doctor or pharmacist about these and see if there is anything that can be done to reduce these, like taking the medication at a particular time.”
- “Set reminders on your phone to help you manage your medication schedule.”

Household Tasks



- “Don't fill the kettle to the top, just boil as much water as you need. It isn't as heavy and doesn't use as much electricity.”
- “Buy a long-handled brush and pan set. The brush is handy for sweeping floors with just one hand and it is less fatiguing than hoovering.”
- “Buy an easy-to-use tin opener such as an electric one.”
- “Use a rucksack or wheeled shopping trolley for shopping trips so you don't need to try and carry bags.”
- “Lower the ironing board and iron sitting down!”
- “Buy bigger bedsheets as they are easier to work with when making your bed.”
- “Use a grabber stick to help around the house. It can be used to pick things up but also for tasks like cleaning windows.”
- “Use spray mops which have the bottle for water attached as they are lighter and easier to use than a mop and bucket.”

Cognition

- “Write everything down to help you remember things and put appointments on a calendar or in a diary.”
- “Keep your brain occupied. Keep reading and try crosswords as activities like this are helpful for vision and concentration.”
- “To improve your fine motor skills, build Lego or do jigsaws. This not only helps bring on your strength but also your cognition as you have to think where pieces go.”
- “Listen to audio books and podcasts if you have difficulty reading or concentrating for longer periods of time.”



Health and Physical Activity

- “Many leisure centres offer the Healthwise scheme which is a free physical activity scheme specifically for people with certain health conditions. Activities include walking, swimming, group activities and training in a fitness suite. You have to be referred to take part in Healthwise so ask your health professional about this.”
- “Focus on healthy eating to support your health- eat more fruit and veg, eat less fatty and sugary foods, reduce your salt intake and so on.”
- “Make a conscious decision to use your weaker side to try and do things, for example, switch on a light with your weaker hand.”
- “Push yourself even if you don’t want to. Repeat tasks over and over again until they become easier.”
- “Do gentle exercise like walking, gardening and light cleaning. It all counts!”



Mobility



- “Wear rubber gloves when going up and down stairs as it stops hands slipping on the bannisters.”
- “If it will help, get a stair rail or a rail outside your home.”
- “A plastic bag on a car seat can make it easier to slide in and out of the passenger side seat.”
- “Don't be afraid or embarrassed to use walking aids like sticks or rollators if they help you get about.”
- “If your mobility has been impacted by a stroke you might be eligible for a Blue Badge which helps you to park closer to your destination. Look at the NI Direct website to see if you are eligible to apply for a Blue Badge for parking.”
- “If you are below the age for Translink’s 60+ or Senior (65+) SmartPass, you might be eligible for a concession travel card which makes traveling by bus or train cheaper. Check the Translink website for more information.”
- “Translink’s timetables indicate which routes use accessible buses. If you wish to travel on a service not advertised as accessible, you can call the Contact Centre at least 24 hours before travel.”
- “The Red Cross provides short-term loans of mobility aids including wheelchairs, commodes, walking sticks and frames.”



Dealing with Fatigue



- “Accept help from others, and don't be afraid to ask for it if you need it.”
- “Don't rush and don't worry about how long it takes to do things.”
- “Listen to your body and take a rest when you need it. Sleep is so important to your recovery.”
- “Plan your day around fatigue.”
- “Lying down is also resting, even if you don't feel like sleeping.”
- “Daily exercise can help with managing fatigue. Even a few minutes, if you can, will help make a difference.”
- “Start small and do things little and often.”
- “Use a ‘traffic light system’ so you don't rush into anything. Red - stop; amber - get ready; green - go. This will help you to pace yourself.”
- “Eat well. A healthy, balanced diet will have a positive impact on how you feel.”
- “Don't be afraid to let visitors know when you are getting tired and need to rest. You aren't being rude!”
- “Limit yourself to one activity or social interaction per day to avoid doing too much. Meet a friend or go to the shops, don't do both.”



Mental Impact



- “Write down your thoughts and feelings. Keep a journal and look back on your progress.”
- “Join groups for peer support, like the NICHHS Wellness Sessions and Young Stroke Support group. Talking to others in a similar situation can really help.”
- “Put on a funny film and laugh!”
- “Play some music you like to help you relax.”
- “Try to leave the past in the past and concentrate on what you can do and not on what you can't.”
- “Physical activity can really help with boosting your mental health.”
- “Enjoy your pets. Walking your dog or stroking your cat can be very relaxing.”
- “Celebrate your successes. Recovery can be slow and recognising your achievements helps fuel progress.”
- “There are helplines that can offer support such as The Samaritans and Lifeline.”
- “Be patient and kind with yourself.”
- “Get help from a professional, talk to your GP if you feel you need more help and support.”
- “Feeling frustrated, anxious and irritable post stroke is normal, just don't let these sorts of feelings take over your life.”
- “Try to be patient with family and friends who may also find the new situation difficult and upsetting.”
- “Explain to family and friends if you would like to try and do things yourself. Keep your independence where you can.”
- “Know that crying sometimes is normal.”



Technology and Aids



- “There are lots of websites offering useful daily living aids which can make life that bit easier. Things like adapted cutlery, specially designed plates and bowls, non-slip pads for kitchen worktops, adapted cooking utensils and chopping boards, and so much more.”
- “Using subtitles when watching TV can help you concentrate and better understand the dialogue.”
- “Get a JAM card or download the app. The JAM card is free and gives people the opportunity to make others aware that they need extra time and understanding. Banks, supermarkets, transport providers and many other organisations know about the JAM card and their staff are trained to assist and help people who need additional support. If you are a client of NICHS, your Family Support Coordinator can order you a JAM card.”
- “Use a Smartwatch to help you tell the time. It is also useful for reminding you what date and day it is.”
- “Using a whiteboard can help family and carers and non-verbal stroke survivors to communicate information.”
- “Communication cards with images can help non-verbal stroke survivors to communicate their needs, such as bathroom, coffee, medication and so on.”
- “Get a simple mobile phone or one with bigger buttons as they can be easier to use.”
- “Get a clock which shows the day, date and time.”
- “Taking doors off certain cupboards in the kitchen and bathroom can make it easier to get things you need.”
- “Put up a wall mounted key box outside your house which can be accessed via a secure code so that family, friends and carers can let themselves in.”
- “Contact your Council to request a RADAR key which opens locked public toilets with disabled access. These can also be bought online from the likes of Amazon.”



- “Use the accessibility settings on things like mobiles, e-readers and tablets to view information more easily. You can do things like increase the font size, bold text, enable magnification, use high contrast mode and dark mode.”
- “Use smart speakers and virtual assistants like Alexa and Siri to remind you about medication, appointments, exercise, shopping lists, and to do lists.”
- “Install and use aids wherever you need them. Grab rails can help with getting in and out of the shower and bath, bath and shower seats allow you to sit whilst getting washed, and raised toilet seats can help make going to the bathroom easier.”
- “If you have Alexa at home, connect it to your phone because if you have a fall and are unable to get up and get to your phone you can still contact your family or a friend for help.”
- “Order your shopping online and have it delivered.”
- “Put ICE, which means ‘in case of emergency’ in front of the name of the person you would like called in an emergency and add it to your contacts in your phone e.g. ICE husband. This lets the emergency services know who to phone in an emergency.”

Carers



- “Carers NI provide information and support for carers, including information about finances and benefits.”
- “Let the person you care for try to be as independent as their personal situation lets them, if that is what they want.”
- “Crossroads Care NI provide information and support for carers of all ages and those they care for.”
- “Try and make time to do things you enjoy. Caring for someone is a big responsibility and you need time to focus on your own wellbeing too.”
- “Your Health and Social Care Trust can do a carer’s assessment to see if you are entitled to any services that could make your caring role easier.”

Useful Organisations



- “The support available from NICHS is amazing. From their Family Support Service to the Post Rehab Exercise Programme (PREP), Taking Control Self-Management Programme, and Wellness Sessions, they are there to help, every step of the way.”
- “Advice Space can help with benefits information, and their services are free. If you are an NICHS client, they can offer a FastTrack referral service to Advice Space.”
- “Local councils provide the Home Safety Scheme. A Home Safety Officer can visit you to provide safety information and advice on topics such as falls in the home, fire safety and electrical dangers.”

If you would like more information on how the NICHS Care Services team could help you as a person living with a chest, heart or stroke condition, or as someone caring for or supporting somebody with a condition, please get in touch with our team at nichs.org.uk/getsupport or call us on 028 9032 0184. You can also visit nichs.org.uk/support for further information.

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