



Stroke: An explanation for children

Sometimes people have a sudden illness which is called a 'Stroke'. It happens unexpectedly and often without warning. A Stroke is an illness which always affects the brain, and as the brain acts like an engine running the rest of the body, a Stroke can be a serious illness. This factsheet explains what happens when someone has a Stroke.

Our bodies work by pumping blood around through tubes called blood vessels. If these blood vessels aren't healthy or something goes wrong, they can get blocked or can burst and cause bleeding, just like bleeding on the skin if you cut yourself or graze your knee. When this happens in the brain, it can affect all the ordinary, everyday things we do.

Sometimes the person who has had a Stroke has to go to hospital to have treatment, but if it's a mild Stroke rather than a serious one, they can stay at home. Sometimes, people who are already in hospital for another reason can have a Stroke in the brain.

The brain tells our arms and legs to move when we want them to. So, an illness in the brain can stop the brain sending these messages to the rest of the body. This often means that people who have had a Stroke can't walk or move in the way they did before. It might even make it more difficult for them to do ordinary things like talking, reading, writing and spelling words or understanding what other people are saying to them. But it doesn't make people less intelligent or less clever than they were before.

Sometimes people who have had a Stroke forget things you've just told them or can't remember things they always used to be able to remember. It doesn't mean they are silly or stupid – it just means the Stroke has made them a little bit more forgetful than they were before they had the illness.

A Stroke happens because the person has a medical problem in the same way as if they had another sort of illness, like a heart attack or asthma. But because a Stroke nearly always comes 'out of the blue', other people often think it has happened because of an accident or a nasty shock they had or because they were upset about something that had happened, like an argument in the family. But doctors know that these things don't bring on a Stroke any more than they cause any other kind of illness and so it's never anyone else's fault if someone has a Stroke.

With some illnesses, people get well again very quickly and they come home from hospital quickly. But a Stroke is the sort of illness that takes a very long time to get over, because our brains are so complicated and are so important to us.

PLEASE TURN OVER



Stroke and children



Stroke and children

Some people who have had a Stroke may get other things like an infection, because we are all more likely to catch something when we are already feeling unwell. When this happens, the doctors at the hospital have to give the person extra treatment.

The doctors and nurses at the hospital or doctor's surgery do all they can to assist people get better and sometimes other people assist as well. These people are called the physiotherapist, the speech pathologist and the occupational therapist. Social workers also assist both the person and their family after a Stroke.

Families always ask the doctors and nurses at the hospital what they think is going to happen, but even the doctors can't always tell you what to expect, or whether someone is going to get better, or how long it is going to take. But our brains are very clever as well as very complicated and can relearn the things they used to do and a lot of people do get much better, bit by bit.

Every individual who has a Stroke is different in the way they get better and in how long it takes them. Some people learn to do some things again but never get completely better and have to use a wheelchair or walking stick to get around, or don't talk to you in the same way they did before.

To start with, people who have had a Stroke usually feel very tired and want to sleep a lot. They may not want to talk to other people or have too many visitors. Often, they cry because they feel sad about things and sometimes they cry because they just can't help it. Sometimes people who have had a Stroke laugh when you don't expect them to or when you don't think they should. This isn't because they really think sad things are funny, but because their brain feels a little bit muddled.

These things are difficult for other people to understand because the person who has had a Stroke may not look any different. If you've fallen over and broken your leg, you get a lot of sympathy because other people can see your problem. But a lot of the things a Stroke does can't be seen just by looking at the person, and other people who haven't had the chance to learn about the illness often don't understand and say the wrong things. That's because no one has told them about the brain and how the brain is in charge of everything we do and makes us walk and helps us to find the words to tell our thoughts and feelings.

Although the person who has had a Stroke hasn't become a different person, they sometimes behave a little bit differently because of it. But they are still the same person underneath and still love the people they loved before and enjoy doing the things they did before.

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