



# How Should I Communicate with Heart and Stroke Patients?

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When someone has a heart attack, heart surgery or a stroke, they need special consideration while they are recovering or adjusting to their life after one of these events. They are likely to have emotional ups and downs and sometimes may become clinically depressed. Often roles between the survivor and the caregiver are reversed.



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## Communicating with a heart attack or heart surgery patient:

- Expect emotional ups and downs, crying for no reason, nightmares and fears of death.
- Give yourselves time to adjust to the situation and freely express your emotions to one another.
- Encourage your loved one to start making the necessary changes to prevent further events or complications.
- Accept the fact that your roles may be reversed, at least temporarily.
- Encourage your loved one to get back into life and make plans together for the future.
- Even though he or she is sick, remember that you still deserve to be treated with respect.
- Be a good listener. Your loved one may need to openly express how he or she is feeling.
- Use “I” messages rather than “you” messages. When you feel angry or frustrated, say “I feel angry,” instead of “You make me angry” to express your feeling without blaming others.

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## Communicating with a stroke survivor:

- Remember that many stroke survivors may have damage that makes it difficult for them to communicate properly.
- Accept whatever communication form they have, even if it’s just making signs with their hands.
- Learn everything you can about their condition so you can be more understanding and helpful.
- Join support groups and learn how others have managed to break down communication barriers.
- With aphasia, it’s not necessary to talk louder, just more slowly. Avoid talking down to your loved one, and be a good and patient listener.
- Stroke survivors may have many emotional ups and downs. Get help for your loved one if these become severe or last too long.

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## How can I help my loved one after a heart attack or surgery?

Understand that they have experienced physical and emotional trauma. Be patient, and let them talk to you about their fears and feelings.

Learn as much as you can about their condition and help them get back into life.

Call 1-800-AHA-USA1 (1-800-242-8721) or visit [americanheart.org](http://americanheart.org) to learn more about heart attack, heart surgery and heart disease.

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## How can I help my loved one after a stroke?

Stroke can change a person's life forever. Your loved one may be disabled or have difficulty communicating. It's important for you to get support, have patience and be prepared to create a different way of life for you and your loved one.

For information on stroke, call 1-888-4-STROKE (1-888-478-7653) or visit [StrokeAssociation.org](http://StrokeAssociation.org).

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## What are the warning signs of heart attack and stroke?

### Warning Signs of Heart Attack

Some heart attacks are sudden and intense, but most of them start slowly with mild pain or discomfort with one or more of these symptoms:

- **Chest discomfort**
- **Discomfort in other areas of the upper body**
- **Shortness of breath with or without chest discomfort**
- **Other signs including breaking out in a cold sweat, nausea or lightheadedness**

### Warning Signs of Stroke

- **Sudden weakness or numbness of the face, arm or leg, especially on one side of the body**
- **Sudden confusion, trouble speaking or understanding**
- **Sudden trouble seeing in one or both eyes**
- **Sudden trouble walking, dizziness, loss of balance or coordination**
- **Sudden, severe headache with no known cause**

Learn to recognize a stroke. Time lost is brain lost.

Call 9-1-1 ... Get to a hospital immediately if you experience signs of a heart attack or stroke!

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## Do you have questions or comments for the doctor or nurse?

Take a few minutes to write your questions for the next time you see your healthcare provider. For example:

*Since my loved one's stroke, we can no longer talk together. How will we ever learn to communicate with the new disabilities my loved one has?*

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