



# How Should I Communicate as a Caregiver?

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As a caregiver, you have to communicate with many people: your loved one, family, friends, co-workers, bosses, healthcare professionals and insurance companies. Constructive and effective communication is key to your success.

Although your time and patience may be stretched thin, it's important to stay organized, separate your emotions from your conversations and keep on the subject for each person you talk to. Here are some simple guidelines to help you stay focused and get the best results.



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## Communication Tips

### Talking to your family:

- Talk openly about your fears, worries and needs.
- Remember that everyone is feeling the pressure and insecurity of the event and try to be patient. Give everyone time to adjust in his or her own manner.

### Talking to healthcare professionals:

- Write all your questions down to make sure you get all topics covered.
- Keep records of all that occurs with your loved one. It will help the doctor give better treatment.
- Separate your anger and sense of frustration about not being able to help your loved one from your feelings about the doctor. Remember, you are both on the same side.

### Talking to your loved one:

- Give both of you time to accept what has happened and realize that your roles may have changed.
- Be assertive, honest, patient and kind.
- Use “I” messages rather than “you” messages. Saying “I feel angry” rather than “You made me angry” enables you to express your feelings without blaming others or causing them to become defensive.
- If your loved one has aphasia after a stroke, find support to help learn the best way to communicate.

## If your loved one had a heart attack:

A heart attack frightens everyone. Your loved one will need time to adjust and may be very emotional and sometimes cry for no reason. You both need to communicate your real feelings to each other. You'll also need to help your loved

one follow the doctor's recommendations for the best possible recovery.

Call 1-800-AHA-USA1 (1-800-242-8721) or visit [americanheart.org](http://americanheart.org) to learn more about heart disease or get help caring for a loved one.

## If your loved one had a stroke:

Stroke can have a big impact on your loved one's ability to communicate, especially if your loved one has aphasia. Be willing to accept ANY form of communication as equally

valid: gestures, writing, drawing, using a communication notebook, intonation or speech.

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

## 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!

## 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:

*What can I do to help my loved one get back to as normal a life as possible?*



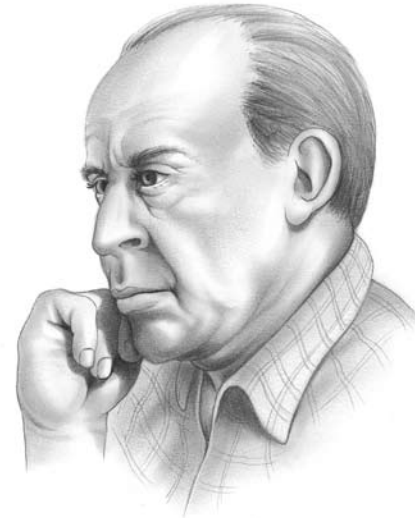


# What Is Caregiver Burnout?

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Your emotional and psychological health can affect your physical health. Many caregivers don't take time to care for themselves and begin to show signs of caregiver "burnout."

Your healthy body, mind and spirit benefit your loved one just as they benefit you. Learn the signs of caregiver burnout and seek help if you are experiencing them.



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## Signs of Caregiver Burnout

As a caregiver, you're under a lot of stress. It's common to go into a "caregiving frenzy" and let your own health suffer. Watch out for:

- Excessive use of alcohol, medications or sleeping pills
- Appetite changes — either eating too much or too little
- Depression, hopelessness, feelings of alienation, lack of energy to do new things
- Thoughts of death
- Losing control physically or emotionally
- Neglect or rough treatment of the person for whom you are caring
- Trouble falling or staying asleep
- Difficulty concentrating, missing appointments
- Marked loss of interest or pleasure
- Feeling worthless or guilty
- Change in appetite or weight
- Loss of energy
- Fearfulness of activity
- Sleeping too much or too little
- Lack of interest in personal hygiene
- Lack of interest in sex
- Anxiety
- Tearfulness
- Easily distracted
- Agitation or restlessness
- Inability to concentrate, make decisions, remember or comprehend instructions
- Thoughts of death or suicide
- Failure to return to work

Check for signs of depression also. Consult a doctor if you have experienced four or more of these for at least two weeks:

- Depressed mood (despondent, pessimistic about the future, hopelessness, withdrawn)

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## How can I avoid burnout?

It takes a combination of things to avoid burnout. Taking care of your physical health is a good way to stay emotionally healthy. Good nutrition and physical activity both help fight depression. And a good night's sleep can work wonders.

Call 1-800-AHA-USA1 (1-800-242-8721) or visit [americanheart.org](http://americanheart.org) to learn more about heart health and get tips on eating right and getting enough physical activity in your daily life.

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## What do I do about depression?

Clinical depression is a serious illness and can keep you from being a good caregiver for your loved one. Depression is also common among survivors of heart and stroke events.

Stroke patients who may be disabled are especially at risk for depression.

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 your doctor?

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

*I have many signs of depression.  
Is there a treatment that  
will help me feel better and provide  
better care for my loved one?*

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*Learn and Live.*

# Let's Talk About the Stroke Family Caregiver

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## What is a stroke family caregiver?

People who provide help for stroke survivors are often called caregivers. Everyone involved in helping a stroke survivor is a caregiver — the spouse, family members and friends. Often one person, generally a spouse, will provide most of the care.

It's important that caregivers and stroke survivors strive to be “care partners” in their efforts. It's often a challenge for both to adjust to their changed roles. The adjustment may be easier if the caregiver and stroke survivor share in decision-making as much as possible and try to share their feelings honestly.



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## What should a caregiver do?

There is no one “job description” that explains what all caregivers do. Each caregiver's responsibilities vary according to the needs of the stroke survivor. This may require several adjustments. Role changes and new skills may need to be learned. Common responsibilities of caregiving include:

- Providing physical help with personal care and transportation.
- Managing financial, legal and business affairs.
- Monitoring behavior to ensure safety.
- Managing housework and meal preparation.
- Coordinating health care and monitoring medications.
- Helping the survivor maintain learned rehab skills and work to improve them.
- Providing emotional support for the stroke survivor and family members.
- Encouraging the stroke survivor to be as independent as possible.

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## Is there assistance for caregivers?

Many people find caring for another person very rewarding. But there are times when a stroke survivor's needs are too much for any one person. Sometimes a caregiver just needs a break. These community resources may be helpful:

- Adult day care — professional supervision of adults in a social setting during the day.
- Adult foster homes — supervised care in approved (licensed) private homes.
- Meal programs (Meals on Wheels) — a federally sponsored nutrition program.

- Home health aide service — in-home personal care assistance.
- Homemaker assistance — supervised, trained personnel who help with household duties.
- Respite care — people come into the home for a limited time to give caregivers a break. Some nursing homes also provide short-term respite care.

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## How can I learn more?

- Talk to your doctor, nurse or other healthcare professionals. Ask about other stroke topics. This is one of many *Let's Talk About Stroke* fact sheets.
- For more information about stroke, or to get more fact sheets, call the American Stroke Association at 1-888-4-STROKE (1-888-478-7653) or visit us online at [StrokeAssociation.org](http://StrokeAssociation.org).
- If you or someone you know has had a stroke, call the American

Stroke Association's "Warmline" at 1-888-4-STROKE (1-888-478-7653), and:

- ✓ Speak with other stroke survivors and caregivers trained to answer your questions and offer support
- ✓ Get information on stroke support groups in your area.
- ✓ Sign up to get *Stroke Connection*, a free magazine for stroke survivors and caregivers.

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## Do you have questions for your doctor or nurse?

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

What services are available in my community?

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Is there a stroke support group or caregiver support group in my area?

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Do you know of any other national organizations that support caregivers?

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# 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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# How Should I Care for Myself as a Caregiver?

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As a caregiver, you have a higher risk for health and emotional problems. That's because caregivers are less likely than noncaregivers to attend to their own health by eating nutritious foods, getting physical activity and treating physical and emotional problems. It feels like your first responsibility is to your loved one, but it's really to yourself. Learn to organize your duties as a caregiver and find the time to take care of your own health. It will help you do a better job for your loved one.



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## Tips for Caregiver Success

The National Family Caregivers Association offers these 10 tips for family caregivers.

1. Choose to take charge of your life, and don't let your loved one's illness or disability always take centerstage.
2. Remember to be good to yourself. Love, honor and value yourself. You're doing a very hard job and you deserve some quality time just for you.
3. Watch out for signs of depression and don't delay in getting professional help when you need it.
4. When people offer to help, accept the offer and suggest specific things they can do.
5. Educate yourself about your loved one's condition. Information is empowering.
6. There's a difference between caring and doing. Be open to new technologies and ideas that promote your loved one's independence and help you do your job easier.
7. Trust your instincts. Most of the time they'll lead you in the right direction.
8. Grieve for your losses and then allow yourself to dream new dreams.
9. Stand up for your rights as a caregiver and as a citizen.
10. Seek support from other caregivers. There is great strength in knowing that you are not alone.

## How do I care for my physical health?

Eat right, make time for physical activity and keep all your medical appointments. Monitor these risk factors for heart attack and stroke:

- Tobacco smoke
- High blood cholesterol
- High blood pressure
- Physical inactivity
- Obesity and overweight

- Diabetes mellitus

Call 1-800-AHA-USA1 (1-800-242-8721) or visit [americanheart.org](http://americanheart.org) to learn more about risk factors and how to manage them.

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

## How do I care for my emotional health?

Caregiving can have a great emotional impact. It's important to learn the signs of clinical depression and get help if you experience several of these symptoms for two weeks or more.

Depression can often be treated with medication. If you need help dealing with your emotions, seek out a support group, counselor or physician.

## 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

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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!

## 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:

*Can you recommend a counselor who will understand my needs as a caregiver*

*and help me cope?*





# How Can I Support My Loved One?

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Someone close to you has just had a heart attack, stroke or heart treatment. To help you handle your feelings, it's good to be aware of them and to share them with people you trust. Talk with members of your family, friends, clergy and healthcare professionals.

You and your loved one may also benefit from your local Mended Hearts or stroke club — support groups for heart and stroke patients and their families. A heart attack, stroke or heart operation affects the whole family — not just the patient. Ask your healthcare professional for ways you can get help with the problems it may cause.



It's common for a heart or stroke patient's loved ones to have many concerns and fears. You can deal with them by talking about your feelings, getting answers to your questions and taking care of yourself.

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## How will I feel?

- **Guilty.** Try thinking about making healthy changes instead of worrying about the past.
- **Afraid your loved one is dying.** Talk to the person about your fears. Even though it's hard, it's also wise to make sure your finances, wills and insurance are in order so you all feel more prepared for the future.
- **Overwhelmed.** Ask for help! Many friends and relatives will be happy to help out with meals, rides and childcare.
- **Depressed.** It's common to feel sad and edgy at a time like this. You may have trouble sleeping, have less energy and feel ill. These feelings should go away as things get better.

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## What will change?

- **You'll have less time to yourself.** Try to take time every day to do the things you enjoy. Take care of yourself. If you work, going back to your job will help distract you.
- **Your sex life may change.** Talk about your feelings with your spouse and the doctor. It's best to resume sexual activities slowly and stay close with your spouse as he or she recovers.

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## How can I help?

- Ask questions at the hospital.
- Discuss things with your spouse and children.
- Praise your spouse for new good habits, and try not to nag.
- Take a CPR class.
- Learn the warning signs of heart attack, sudden cardiac arrest and stroke.
- Help your spouse manage his or her medicine and treatment.

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## How can we be healthy?

- Read about healthy lifestyles and follow the doctor's advice.
- Use low-saturated-fat, low-cholesterol foods that your spouse will like.
- Make changes slowly, one step at a time.
- Try exercising with your spouse.
- Help your spouse stop smoking, and if you smoke, quit.
- Suggest active outings for the family.

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## How can I learn more?

1. Talk to your doctor, nurse or other health-care professionals. If you have heart disease or have had a stroke, members of your family also may be at higher risk. It's very important for them to make changes now to lower their risk.
2. Call 1-800-AHA-USA1 (1-800-242-8721) or visit [americanheart.org](http://americanheart.org) to learn more about heart disease.
3. For information on stroke, call 1-888-4-STROKE (1-888-478-7653) or visit [StrokeAssociation.org](http://StrokeAssociation.org).

We have many other fact sheets and educational booklets to help you make healthier choices to reduce your risk, manage disease or care for a loved one.

Knowledge is power, so *Learn and Live!*

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## Do you have questions or comments for your doctor?

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

Where can I take a CPR class?

Can I help with rehabilitation?