

WHERE TO FIND US

Head Office

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Fax: 0131 220 6313
65 North Castle Street
Edinburgh EH2 3LT
Open Mon – Fri
www.chss.org.uk

Glasgow

Tel: 0141 633 1666
Fax: 0141 633 5113
103 Clarkston Road
Glasgow G44 3BL
Open Mon – Fri

Inverness

Tel: 01463 713 433
Fax: 01463 713 699
5 Mealmarket Close
Inverness IV1 1HT
Open Mon – Fri
Coffee shop open
Mon – Sat

Chest, Heart and Stroke Scotland is an autonomous Scottish Charity. We receive no government funding and rely entirely on public subscription to fulfil our programme of activities.

We need £3 million a year to fulfil our commitment to improving lives for Scottish people. We need your help and your money to help others. You can help by volunteering your time as a fundraiser, VSS volunteer or support your local Regional office. You can send a donation, remember us in your Will, take out a Deed of Covenant or organise a fundraising event.

Designed by Creative Link, North Berwick

STROKE SERIES SS6

SEX AFTER STROKE ILLNESS

If you would like to speak to one of our Advice Line nurses, in confidence, phone the Chest, Heart and Stroke Scotland Advice Line

Monday – Friday
9.30am - 12.30 and 1.30pm - 4.00pm

0845 077 6000

Email: adviceline@chss.org.uk
Textphone available

Registered Charity No. SC018761

September 2002





Chest, Heart & Stroke Scotland, is an independent medical charity which aims to improve the quality of life for people in Scotland affected by chest, heart and stroke illnesses, through medical research, advice and information and support in the community.

FUNDRAISING

CHSS is an independent Scottish medical charity. We receive no Government funding and rely entirely on the Scottish public to raise the £3 million a year we need to help people with chest, heart and stroke illness throughout Scotland.

RESEARCH

We are one of Scotland's largest charitable funders of medical research, with a programme worth over £500,000 a year. We fund research projects throughout Scotland into all aspects of the prevention, diagnosis, treatment and social impact of chest, heart and stroke illness. If you would like more details, please call (0131) 225 6963 for an explanatory leaflet.

WELFARE

We provide small grants to people in financial difficulty because of chest, heart or stroke illness, for items ranging from clothing and bedding, to respite care. Applications are submitted through local Social Work Departments, or health professionals; for further information call (0131) 225 6963.

VOLUNTEER STROKE SERVICE (VSS)

We give practical help to people whose communication skills are impaired after a stroke. The VSS provides weekly group meetings and home visits for patients. For details ask for our VSS leaflet and Group Directory.

CHSS NURSES

Our nurses provide independent practical advice and support to those who have chest, heart and stroke illnesses, their families, carers and health professionals. There are dedicated nursing services in Highland, Grampian, Glasgow and Edinburgh. There is also a Scotland wide nurse led Advice Line (0845) 077 6000 calls are charged at a local call rate (out of hours answerphone). We have a wide range of booklets, factsheets and videos on chest, heart and stroke illnesses, which help towards an understanding of these conditions. Please ask for our publication list.

COMMUNITY SUPPORT NETWORK

CHSS provides support to affiliated chest, heart and stroke clubs through the Community Support Network. The clubs are independent and are run by local volunteers. The groups provide a range of activities and offer people support, stimulation and companionship in a friendly and relaxed environment. Please ask for the Group Directory for more information.

SEX AFTER STROKE ILLNESS

Introduction

Your recovery from a stroke will have taken you through various stages. Coming to terms with what has happened to you takes time and initially you will have been focusing on the more functional aspects of your stroke such as learning to walk, talk and care for yourself. Further down the line your mind may turn to more personal matters such as establishing or renewing a sexual relationship. If being sexually active was important to you before your stroke it is likely that you will feel that way again. However there may be some physical and emotional issues that now have to be considered.

Stroke affects everyone differently and to different degrees so it is very unlikely for two people to have exactly the same experience.

This booklet aims to look at some of the issues involved in being sexually active after stroke and will hopefully answer some questions that you may have.

Our special thanks go to all the patients and health professionals involved in the making of this booklet.

Fear

The common fear following a stroke is that having sex will bring on another stroke. There is no reason why after a couple of weeks you cannot begin to have sex if you feel ready to do so. Medical evidence supports this. If you still feel unsure about having sex then arrange to speak to your General Practitioner (GP).

Physical changes

Having a stroke does not have to mean the end of being sexually active, although changes may be involved.

Physically stroke can affect men and women in different ways.

Both may find that libido (sex drive) is lessened due to tiredness, anxiety, depression, doubts about self-image and concerns for the future.

A woman may find that sexual arousal takes longer after her stroke. There may be a loss of sensation or a degree of vaginal dryness, which may hinder sexual activity.

A man is more likely to be concerned if he finds he is unable to achieve or sustain an erection. This can happen after a stroke for many reasons but it is also common after any serious illness. Unfortunately many men equate this with their masculinity and worrying about failing to have an erection can have that very effect. So a vicious circle begins. After a stroke, even if one side of the body has been affected, the nerve processes involved on the unaffected side are usually enough to sustain an erection.

Other reasons for impotence in men

The side effect of some prescribed anti-depressants; conditions such as diabetes and prostate problems may also cause erection problems in men. These types of problems may require further intervention by your GP, who may review your medications and if needed refer you to a specialist.

Increase in libido

A minority of people experience an increased libido and sexual activity after a stroke. In the most part, this is probably explained by improved relations with your partner and by improvement in the emotional and social aspects experienced.

Very rarely a stroke can cause a disorder called hypersexuality, which can be related to the area of brain damaged by the stroke. This is described as an abnormal, increased sexual desire.



Emotional changes

Both men and women experience similar emotional problems after a stroke. How you feel about yourself and how you perceive others feel towards you, can lead to you losing confidence in yourself. Adjusting to the changes in your life after a stroke can take time to come to terms with and many people experience anxiety and depression as a result. This can have a knock on affect on your desire for sex.

There can be a subtle change within a relationship when a partner becomes a carer, especially when assistance is needed with personal care. This can sometimes cause embarrassment or affect the way you feel about each other.



Communication

Retaining closeness and intimacy within your relationship will help to overcome difficulties. It is important to keep communicating with each other. You can express your feelings in many different ways, through talking but also with body language and physical contact such as kissing and cuddling. Getting the better of anxiety and shyness in taking the first step may be the biggest hurdle to overcome.

*You can
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Potential difficulties

It is very important to remember that there are physical, emotional and social reasons for a decline in sexual function and satisfaction after a stroke.

Physical difficulties

- Tiredness
- Delayed arousal
- Vaginal dryness
- Medication induced impotence
- Loss of movement
- Loss of sensation
- Having a urinary catheter

Emotional difficulties

- Fear of impotence or loss of sex drive
- Actual loss of sexual desire
- Changes in self image
- Decreased confidence
- Low self esteem
- Change in social role - in family and community
- Embarrassment
- Anxiety
- Depression

Social difficulties and general attitude towards sexuality

- Inability to discuss sexuality
- Unwillingness to participate in sexual activity
- Degree of physical disability involved

Blood Pressure

Many people worry that having sex will raise their blood pressure too high.

In fact sex only affects your blood pressure in the same way as exercise does. It is very rare for strokes to happen during sexual activity, but if this is worrying you, you should speak to your doctor for reassurance.

Unfortunately, some blood pressure lowering drugs can cause impotence in some men. This is completely reversible by changing to a different group of drugs. Therefore, it is vital that you discuss this with your doctor so that something can be done about it.

Contraception and pregnancy

Following stroke there is no reason why you cannot conceive, have a normal pregnancy and have a healthy baby.

Because there is a small risk attached to taking the combined oral contraceptive pill, alternative methods of family planning may need to be explored; you should discuss this further with your doctor.



Avoid excessive alcohol

Practical steps to improve things

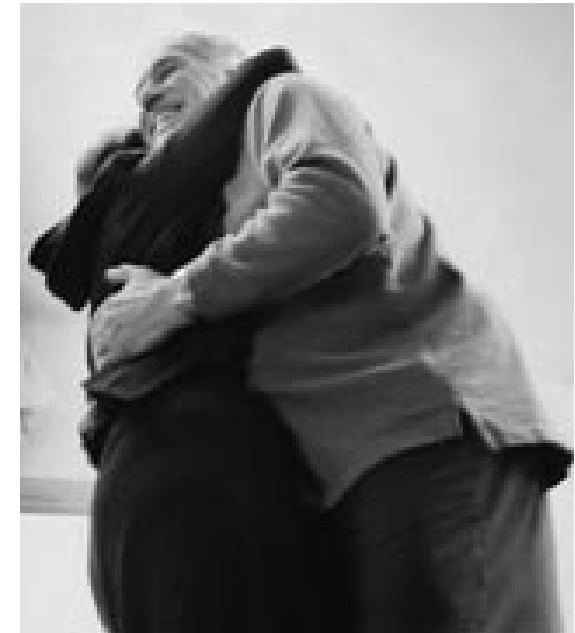
Plan for sexual activity in advance, just as you would plan for any other activity.

- Pay attention to personal hygiene and grooming as this makes most of us feel more attractive and better about ourselves.
- Choose a time when both of you are feeling rested, relaxed and when privacy is guaranteed.
- Avoid a heavy meal or wait a couple of hours after eating.
- Avoid excessive alcohol as this can have an effect on the ability to achieve or maintain an erection.
- Alcohol can also increase tiredness and drowsiness.
- If your stroke restricts your movement and / or sensation, explore different positions, which might suit you both better.
- Try talking with your partner, and identify any problems you are experiencing. Ways around any difficulties can be found.
- Having a urinary catheter need not prevent you from having penetrative sex. Females can tape the tube out of the way; males can wear a condom with the tube folded back over the penis.
- Try using lubrication jelly.

Sexual fulfillment

There are other ways of expressing your feelings for someone and achieving sexual fulfillment even if you cannot manage penetrative sex. Most people feel the need for and benefit from physical contact and you can give and receive a lot of pleasure through kissing, cuddling and massage.

Remember if sex was important to you before your stroke there is no reason why you cannot have a sex life after your stroke, whether this is initiating a new relationship or resuming an old one. However, keeping an open mind and giving yourself time to adjust is often the solution to getting your sex life back on track.



USEFUL ADDRESSES

Chest Heart and Stroke Scotland

65 North Castle Street
 Edinburgh EH2 3LT
 Tel: 0131 225 6963
 Fax: 0131 220 6313
 Advice Line 0845 077 6000 - Phone and
 Textphone
 Email: adviceline@chss.org.uk

Nurse led, confidential help and advice for people suffering from chest, heart and stroke conditions.

CHSS has stroke groups, provides a welfare grant system and can provide a range of publications on chest, heart and stroke conditions.

Website: www.chss.org.uk

SPOD

(Association to aid the sexual and personal relationships of people with a disability)

286 Camden Road
 London N7 0BJ
 Tel: 0207 607 8851

Anybody with a disability experiencing sexual or relationship difficulties can telephone SPOD's counselling line for professional and confidential advice and information.

Alternatively you may wish to write to SPOD's counsellors for advice and, if on-going counselling is appropriate, seek a local referral.

These services are similarly available to professionals and carers who may need information and support.

Couple Counselling Scotland

(Formerly known as Relate)
 18 York Place
 Edinburgh
 EH1 3EP
 Tel: 0131 558 9669
 Fax: 0131 556 6596
 Email: enquiries@couplecounselling.org
 Website: www.couplecounselling.org

Provides a confidential couple counselling service.

Local services are obtained by contacting the Edinburgh number.

Psychosexual counselling service is also available through this organisation.

Further reading is available in all good bookshops.

**Phone/Textphone the Chest,
Heart and Stroke Advice
Line for confidential,
independent advice from one
of our nurses.**



The line is open

**Monday - Friday
9.30 - 12.30 and 1.30 - 4.00**

0845 077 6000

Charged at local call rate.

**Out of hours answering
machine.**

Email: adviceline@chss.org.uk

Fax: 0131 220 6313

STROKE PUBLICATIONS

Booklets

- SS1 Stroke a guide to your rehabilitation
- SS2 Stroke: a carers guide
- SS3 Reducing the risk of stroke
- SS5 Understanding TIA's
- SS6 Sex after stroke illness
- SS29 After your stroke: a first guide
- H4 Living with High Blood Pressure

Video - Stroke Matters:

£35.00

Resource pack comprising two videos and two booklets
(This video can be hired as well as bought.)

Booklets are available separately: Making sense of stroke and
Facing the future.

Factsheets - Free

- | | |
|--|---|
| F2 Salt | F11 Mouthcare after a stroke |
| F3 Cholesterol | F12 BCG - Protection against tuberculosis |
| F4 Warfarin | F13 Air travel for people affected by chest, heart and stroke illness |
| F5 Helping someone with language problems | F14 Eye problems after a stroke |
| F6 Holidays | F15 Memory problems after a stroke |
| F7 Insurance companies | |
| F8 Suggested book list | |
| F9 Driving after a stroke | |
| F10 10 common questions asked after a stroke | |

A full publication list is available from Head Office.

65 North Castle Street, Edinburgh EH2 3LT

Telephone: 0131 225 6963

ORDER FORM

Please send me the following:

TITLE	No. of copies

Up to 100 copies free

Up to 50 factsheets free

Name: _____

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