

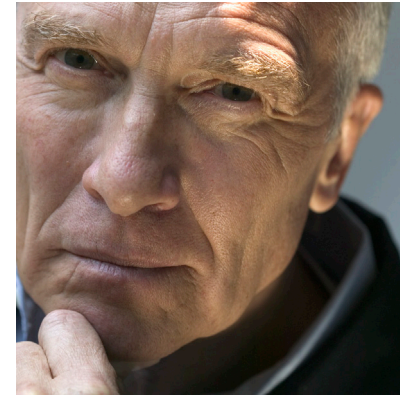
Hints from the Heart



Coping with Emotions After a Stroke

Dealing with a flood of emotions can be hard for stroke survivors. Some emotions are normal responses to the changes in your life after stroke. Grieving for what you have lost is good, but when sadness turns to depression or anxiety, it's time to act. Depression can take hold right after a stroke during rehab or after you go home. Anxiety is an overwhelming sense of worry or fear and can include increased sweating or heart rate. Often, stroke survivors suffer from both depression and anxiety at the same time. If you suffer from depression, anxiety or emotions that are not in line with the occasion, seek help.

There is also another common medical problem among stroke survivors called **PBA or Pseudobulbar Affect**. PBA is a neurological condition that causes sudden, frequent, and involuntary episodes of crying or laughing. During a PBA episode, the emotions a person expresses may be exaggerated or different from his or her inner emotional state. When this happens in social settings, they feel embarrassed, frustrated and angry. They also sense that others are uneasy. They may avoid work, public places and family get-togethers. This can lead to feelings of fear, shame and isolation, but there are ways to help cope.



These things can help you cope with PBA:

- Be open and explain to loved ones that the emotions you show, don't always reflect how you feel on the inside.
- Distract yourself. If you feel an outburst coming on, focus on something boring or unrelated.
- Note the posture you take when crying. When you think you are about to cry, change your posture.
- Breathe in and out slowly until you are in control. Relax your forehead, shoulders and other muscles.
- Stay as active as possible and stay involved in your hobbies.
- Plan daily activities to provide structure, set goals and measure accomplishment.
- Stay involved with people, thoughts and activities that you enjoy.
- Join a stroke support group. Other survivors will understand your issues and offer support.

For more information about coping after a stroke, go to Stroke.org. To learn more about PBA, go to pbainfo.org.

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