

Supporting Your Partner After Stroke

A practical tip sheet for spouses and partners

This tip sheet is designed for spouses and long-term partners of stroke survivors. It reflects common experiences reported by families across Ontario stroke programs and aligns with long-term recovery principles.

1. Understand That Recovery Is Long-Term

- Stroke recovery often continues **well beyond six months**.
- Progress may be slow, uneven, and difficult to notice day to day.
- Plateaus do not always mean recovery has stopped.

Tip: Look for change over months, not days or weeks.

2. Fatigue Is Real—and Often Invisible

- Mental fatigue can be as limiting as physical fatigue.
- Speech, balance, tone, and patience may worsen when tired.
- Your partner may appear fine one moment and struggle the next.

Tip: Encourage rest without framing it as giving up.

3. Mood and Personality Changes Are Common

- Irritability, impulsive speech, reduced affection, or emotional flatness can occur.
- These changes are often neurological—not intentional or personal.

Tip: Separate the stroke effects from the person you love.

4. Communication Takes More Effort

- Speech may be quieter or less clear, especially when fatigued.

- Your partner may speak before fully processing a thought.
- They may struggle to follow fast conversations or in situations where there is background noise.

Tip: Slow the pace. One conversation at a time. Less noise helps.

5. Celebrate Small Wins

- Improvements may be subtle: better balance, smoother movement, less effort.
- Your partner may not notice progress that you can see.

Tip: Gently point out improvements—they matter.

6. Intimacy May Change—and That’s Normal

- Pain, weakness, fatigue, or body awareness issues can affect intimacy.
- Emotional closeness may look different after stroke.

Tip: Focus on connection first. Intimacy can evolve.

7. Safety Matters More Than Pride

- Clutter, wet floors, poor lighting, and uneven surfaces increase fall risk.
- Your partner may resent reminders—even when they are necessary.

Tip: Frame safety as teamwork, not supervision.

8. Advocate When Needed

- Health systems may assume recovery ends too early.
- You may need to ask questions, request referrals, or push back.

Tip: You know your partner best—trust that.

9. You Need Support Too

- Caregiver stress is common and often overlooked.
- Feeling frustrated, sad, or exhausted does not mean you are failing.

Tip: Seeking support for yourself helps both of you.

10. Hope Can Be Realistic

- A full return to pre-stroke life may not be possible.
- A meaningful, connected, and fulfilling life **is** possible.

Tip: Progress is not just physical—it's learning how to live well together.

Remember

You are not just supporting recovery—you are part of it.

*Adapted from lived experience and long-term stroke recovery principles shared in **Driven: A Post-Stroke Journey** by David Robb.*