Norfolk & Suffolk Care Support have put together this guide to caring for people recovering from a stroke.

This guide was commissioned as a response to recommendation 18 in the Stroke Services in Norfolk report, undertaken by the Health Scrutiny Board. It has been developed by members of the Task and Finish Group, regarding the long term care of stroke survivors.
**Nutrition**

Recognise that support with fluids and nutrition can help maintain health and well-being.

- Can the person eat and drink without support? And are they able to swallow easily?
- Do they need a special diet or thickener in drinks?
- If tube fed, are the dietician’s guidelines followed, and is the person positioned correctly?

**Positioning**

Ensure that people are positioned appropriately and have regular changes of position to prevent pressure sores, stiffness and muscle contracture.

- Ensure the person is in a good upright position for meals and drinks to be taken in bed or a chair.
- Always use splints provided. If there are difficulties, seek advice from community therapy teams.
- Ensure that the person has the right mattress and/or cushions to protect pressure areas.

**Stiffness**

Recognise that muscles can become stiff and painful over time in the weak arm and leg, leading to pain, swelling and difficulty with everyday activities.

- Prevent problems by ensuring regular movement within the person’s capability, good positioning and correct use of splints.
- Ensure nails are cut regularly and ensuring that stiff hands are washed and dried thoroughly daily.

**Communication**

Ensure the person is enabled to speak, understand and communicate with those around them.

- Identify how the person communicates and if they require an aid. Use gestures, written words and pictures if helpful.
- Keep information simple and follow guidance.
- Allow time to communicate needs – do not assume a person cannot speak.

**Equipment**

Ensure the person has the appropriate equipment to assist with transfers and walking where needed.

- Check the person is using the recommended equipment, which is in good working order
- Ensure the person uses their own individualised walking equipment and this is not shared.
- Ensure wheelchairs are used only for transit rather than for sitting in for long periods.
- Ensure the person is safe to be left alone in the wheelchair, especially if at risk of falling.
Top Ten Tips

Toileting

Recognise that getting to the toilet safely is important, as often after a stroke people lose control of the bladder or bowel.

- Assess if the person can get to the bathroom safely. Consider footwear, lighting, toilet height.
- Request an assessment by a continence nurse, when appropriate.
- Make a GP referral if there are constipation concerns.
- Are the correct equipment and changing needs of a catheter available and known?

Mood

Recognise that strokes can affect a person emotionally. Sometimes they will have low moods, lack motivation and exhibit fear and anxiety.

- When behavioural changes are of concern, consider referral to the well-being service.
- Ensure that accessible information is made available at all stages of the person’s stroke journey to help them adjust to the emotional impact of the stroke.

Pain and feeling

Ensure there are ways for the person to communicate that they are in pain.

- Consider what is causing the pain: stiffness, skin pressure, inability to move to change position?
- Be aware if the person has a pain management plan
- Be aware that loss of feeling of limbs may mean that the person is unable to detect hot or cold.

Seeing and thinking

Recognise that some people may lose vision to certain areas, or have double or blurred vision after a stroke. They may become disorientated or have reduced short-term memory.

- Introduce yourself and explain how and why you are providing assistance.
- Use of daily diaries of activities and visitors can be helpful for the person and their families.
- Would extra equipment help with orientation e.g. visible clock?
- Ensure food, drink and personal items that the person needs are within their available vision.

Activities

Be aware that stroke can result in a big lifestyle change.

- Consider the person’s interests and how you, friends and family can support them to do these or similar activities.
- Consider how the person can be supported to go out of the home (ask the therapist for advice).
- Encourage the person to participate in daily tasks with some support, if they can.
There are two QCF qualifications, both of which are eligible for Skills for Care’s Workforce Development Funding (WDF) at £15 per credit:

- Level 2 Award in Stroke Awareness (QCF) (3 credits)
- Level 3 Certificate Stroke Care Management (QCF) (26 credits)

Stroke Awareness and Stroke Care Short Courses are eligible for N&SCS Short Course Funding (at £30 per learner).

Stroke Awareness courses are available from ACC Consulting:
accconsulting.co.uk

Various courses are available from the Stroke Association:
stroke.org.uk/training

More information is available from the Learning & Development and Funding areas of our website:
norfolkandsuffolkcaresupport.co.uk