

Dealing With Pain After Stroke

Julia Schwarz

Half of the people who experience a stroke will experience pain after that stroke. Many of these stroke survivors report pain on a daily basis. This constant pain can significantly impact an individual's quality of life and ability to recover. There are many different types of pain that can occur after experiencing a stroke, and if you do experience pain, it is important for you to consult your doctor to determine what kind of pain you have to receive the best treatment for your pain. This article address common types of pain that individuals may experience post-stroke.

Central Post-Stroke Pain:

This syndrome is defined by three things: constant pain, sudden brief breaks in the pain lasting only a few hours, and unpleasant or abnormal sense of touch. It is most common in younger people who have had a stroke, and the symptoms can occur anywhere from a month to six months after stroke. It generally begins just as a survivor's senses are returning. There are various types of medications and therapies to treat central post stroke pain that one should discuss with their doctor (1).

Shoulder Pain:

Shoulder pain is very common in people who experience weakness on one side of their body after a stroke. There are preventative measures that can reduce an individual's chances of developing shoulder pain. Damage can occur when the shoulder is limp, so special precautions like supporting the limb with a sling are often used. Acupuncture is another technique that has helped people suffering from post stroke shoulder pain (2). If you are in pain or are concerned about this, please talk to your doctor or physical therapist. Timing of treatment strategies is crucial to avoid shoulder pain.

Post-Stroke Headache:

Chronic headache is another common symptom for people post-stroke. These headaches are described as tension headaches, which are not aggravated by movement. Headaches after stroke can be caused by a variety of factors, so talk to your healthcare team if you notice headaches (1).

Pain is complicated. While often treatable, it can arise from many different things. This can make it hard to determine what is causing your pain. If you are suffering from any kind of pain after a stroke, it may be helpful to start keeping a pain diary. Write down when the pain begins, how long it lasts, and anything that makes it better or worse. Having this record of the pain will help you and your healthcare team determine its source.

Finally, it is important to be open with your health care professionals about your pain. Many healthcare professionals do not ask their patients directly about pain, and many people will try to fight through their pain without mentioning it to their healthcare professionals. If you are experiencing pain, talk to your doctors about it. Post stroke pain is best treated early, so don't hold back. Let your team help you so that you can focus on your recovery.

Sources:

1. R. A. Harrison, T. S. Field, Post stroke pain: identification, assessment, and therapy. *Cerebrovasc Dis* **39**, 190-201 (2015).
2. J. P. C. Chau *et al.*, Effects of Acupuncture on the Recovery Outcomes of Stroke Survivors with Shoulder Pain: A Systematic Review. *Front Neurol* **9**, 30 (2018).