

IF STROKE STRIKES.....

by Bill Sloan, Stroke Survivor

It was a brilliant mid-spring day, that May 13th! I was stopped at my bank when I was first hit with the strangest feelings. I had no idea that I was being struck by stroke.

I was 45 and a successful businessman. Never, in my wildest dreams, had the thought of any long term illness ever occupied my mind. Stroke? Are you kidding? Me? Not a chance!

The fact remains, that was exactly what happened to me on that glimmering May day. After several months in a coma in an acute rehabilitation hospital, I awoke to a different world than I knew before the stroke. Now, please understand, different does not necessarily connote bad—but *today everything about my life and the way I live it has changed.*

Strokes are like snowflakes—they all look alike from a distance, but each and every one is different. I would like to share with you a brief insight into my daily life and how the way I do things has had to change:

- ✧ **Showering.** I use a shower bench because I cannot stand without my leg brace, an Ankle Foot Orthosis (AFO). The AFO strengthens the knee and corrects drop toe on my right leg. I have had to change both washing and applying deodorant to my left arm (the right is paralyzed), the way I dry my back and several other things that we take for granted if we're not faced with this kind of impairment.
- ✧ **Dressing.** Those of us with hemi paresis (paralysis on one side of the body) will tell you that, when dressing, *we must do the same thing the same way every time.* The paralysis dictates our methods.
- ✧ **Eating.** Some stroke survivors have some difficulty swallowing and have to learn new ways. Stroke can impact one entire side (left or right) of the body affecting the epiglottis, which enables us to “direct” the various functions of our mouth—either to the lungs or to the stomach. The use of a fork and knife to cut food may be either compromised or rendered impossible by the stroke. With no use of my right arm and hand, I have to use a rocker knife. This allows me to cut the food by “rocking” the knife back and forth as opposed to “sawing” the food as is done with a traditional knife
- ✧ **Emotions.** Those of us who have sustained and survived a stroke can and will tell others that *every single facet of our lives has been affected to one degree or another.* These changes can cause some of us to have some emotional imbalance. In my case, having been an athlete and businessman and then finding myself in a wheelchair and unable to speak (a stroke induced brain injury called Aphasia) wreaked havoc with my emotions! Since those early days I've relearned to talk. I'm still in a wheelchair, but today I handle it well and rarely find a place I can't go!



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This is a snapshot of a day in my life, but situations, like people (and snowflakes) are all different. *Recovery from a stroke is possible and most survivors do recover to one degree or another. But please take this thought with you forever: Recovery from any illness or injury is affected by one's attitude. The better the attitude, the better the recovery!*

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