

Many stroke survivors report that their social networks are badly affected

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Academics at City University London have found that having a stroke can badly affect a person's social network, in a study published by the *Journal of Speech Language and Hearing Research*.

Contact with [children](#) and [relatives](#) remained relatively stable. However, many [stroke](#) survivors reported that the [number](#) of friends they saw significantly reduced. Prior to the stroke, 14% said they had one or no friends; by six months post stroke this figure had risen to 36%, with 20% reporting that they had no close friends at all. Many in the study were less satisfied with their social relationships following the stroke; the social networks of 63% were negatively affected.

Stroke is a serious, life-threatening condition. Every year around 110,000 people have a stroke in England and it is the third largest cause of death after heart disease and cancer. It is also the leading cause of adult disability in the UK.

To find out more about how having a stroke affected the nature of social networks, the City team recruited 87 stroke survivors from two acute stroke units based in London teaching hospitals. They interviewed participants at two weeks, three months and six months post stroke, using a range of measures some of which explored social relationships including frequency of contact with friends and family, and satisfaction with that contact.

One factor which made people particularly at risk of losing contact with

people in their social network was aphasia. Aphasia is a language disability that can affect talking, understanding, reading or writing. For around 15% of stroke survivors, aphasia will persist as a life-long condition, and can be a cause of great distress and frustration. This latest research suggests it can also challenge a person's ability to maintain satisfying social relationships, more so even than stroke severity or physical disability.

Those [stroke survivors](#) who had the strongest social networks six months post stroke were those who did not have any language disability, were able to carry out everyday activities in and out of the house (for example, shopping, preparing meals), were black, and perceived themselves to be well-supported.

Speaking about the study, Dr Sarah Northcott, Research Fellow in the School of Health Sciences at City University London, said:

"Our study showed that many stroke [survivors](#) report that their social networks are badly affected. People who have aphasia are particularly at risk of losing contact with friends and their wider social network.

"We know that supportive relationships are crucial in enabling a person to adjust to life following a stroke, so it's really important that we consider a person's support networks during post-stroke rehabilitation. More generally, as a society we need to consider how to prevent people with stroke and aphasia from becoming socially isolated."

More information: Sarah Northcott et al. What Factors Predict Who Will Have a Strong Social Network Following a Stroke?, *Journal of Speech Language and Hearing Research* (2016). [DOI: 10.1044/2016_JSLHR-L-15-0201](#)

Provided by City University London

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