

# One in three stroke survivors may suffer from a treatable condition

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The brain has about 100 billion cells called neurons. It's made up of distinct parts, that developed through human evolution. Credit: American Heart Association

In the first year following a stroke, upwards of 1 in 3 people will experience a treatable condition called spasticity that is described as muscle stiffness, pain and difficulty doing activities they were able to do before their stroke. The American Stroke Association, a division of the

American Heart Association, offers updated evidence-based tools and [resources](#) for stroke survivors to manage spasticity with their health care team.

More than 3 million stroke survivors may wrestle with reduced independence and increased reliance on caregivers due to spasticity. The condition is particularly common in younger stroke survivors like Hub Miller who suffered a stroke at age 41.

"Spasticity changed my life and adds an additional hurdle to my stroke recovery," said Miller, a husband and dad from Indianapolis. "Without being able to open and close my left hand, I can't write, type or drive like I used to. Those are things most of us take for granted until we can't do them."

If left untreated, spasticity can cause painful and debilitating bone and joint deformities, so experts stress the importance of seeing a doctor as soon as any symptoms develop.

"After a stroke, the way your brain communicates with your muscles may change," said Richard D. Zorowitz, MD, volunteer chair of the American Heart Association Stroke Council Rehabilitation and Recovery Committee, chief medical informatics officer and outpatient attending physician at MedStar National Rehabilitation Network. "While there's no cure for spasticity, working with your care team to find the best treatment options for you can help provide comfort, relief and independence."

Benefits of successfully treating spasticity often go beyond the physical.

"When it's difficult to do [everyday tasks](#) like shower, brush your teeth, dress, cook meals, feed yourself or even walk across a room safely, it's not just [physical health](#) that suffers. Mental health can be impacted, too,"

said Zorowitz.

Management plans for spasticity may include targeted injections of botulinum toxin, oral medications, intrathecal baclofen pump therapy, [physical therapy](#) or other methods to improve the muscle's ability to stretch and regain fuller range of motion. Modifications around the home such as [assistive devices](#) and other adaptations to increase independence and safety may also help.

The American Stroke Association offers resources including a [Support Network](#) of [stroke survivors](#) and caregivers who are dealing with the unpredictability a stroke brings, [checklists](#) to help understand spasticity, [discussion guides](#) to take to your next doctor's visit, [resources on spasticity](#) for stroke support group leaders and articles on treatment and care options.

If you or a loved one is dealing with spasticity after a [stroke](#), talk to your doctor or health care team about your options to treat and manage it. Get the resources and tools you need at [www.stroke.org/spasticity](http://www.stroke.org/spasticity).

Provided by American Heart Association

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