

# How Can I Support My Loved One?

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Someone close to you has just had a heart attack, stroke or heart treatment. To help you handle your feelings, it's good to be aware of them and to share them with people you trust. Talk with members of your family, friends, clergy and healthcare professionals.

You and your loved one may also benefit from your local Mended Hearts or stroke club — support groups for heart and stroke patients and their families.

A heart attack, stroke or heart operation affects the whole family — not just the patient. Ask your healthcare professional for ways you can get help with the problems it may cause.



It's common for a heart or stroke patient's loved ones to have many concerns and fears. You can deal with them by talking about your feelings, getting answers to your questions and taking care of yourself.

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## How will I feel?

- Guilty. Try thinking about making healthy changes instead of worrying about the past.
- Afraid your loved one is dying. Talk to the person about your fears. Even though it's hard, it's also wise to make sure your finances, wills and insurance are in order so you all feel more prepared for the future.
- Overwhelmed. Ask for help! Many friends and relatives will be happy to help out with meals, rides and childcare.
- Depressed. It's common to feel sad and edgy at a time like this. You may have trouble sleeping, have less energy and feel ill. These feelings should go away as things get better.

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## What will change?

- You'll have less time to yourself. Try to take time every day to do the things you enjoy. Take care of yourself. If you work, going back to your job will help distract you.
- Your sex life may change. Talk about your feelings with your spouse and the doctor. It's best to resume sexual activities slowly and stay close with your spouse as he or she recovers.

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## How can I help?

- Ask questions at the hospital.
- Discuss things with your spouse and children.
- Praise your spouse for new good habits, and try not to nag.
- Take a CPR class.
- Learn the warning signs of heart attack, sudden cardiac arrest and stroke.
- Help your spouse manage his or her medicine and treatment.

## How can we be healthy?

- Read about healthy lifestyles and follow the doctor’s advice.
- Use low-saturated-fat, low-cholesterol foods that your spouse will like.
- Make changes slowly, one step at a time.
- Try exercising with your spouse.
- Help your spouse stop smoking, and if you smoke, quit.
- Suggest active outings for the family.

## How can I learn more?

1. Talk to your doctor, nurse or other health-care professionals. If you have heart disease or have had a stroke, members of your family also may be at higher risk. It's very important for them to make changes now to lower their risk.
  2. Call 1-800-AHA-USA1 (1-800-242-8721), or visit [americanheart.org](http://americanheart.org) to learn more about heart disease.
  3. For information on stroke, call 1-888-4-STROKE (1-888-478-7653) or visit us online at [StrokeAssociation.org](http://StrokeAssociation.org).
- We have many other fact sheets and educational booklets to help you make healthier choices to reduce your risk, manage disease or care for a loved one.
- Knowledge is power, so *Learn and Live!*

## What are the Warning Signs of Heart Attack and Stroke?

### Warning Signs of Heart Attack:

Some heart attacks are sudden and intense, but most of them start slowly with mild pain or discomfort with one or more of these symptoms:

- Chest discomfort
- Discomfort in other areas of the upper body
- Shortness of breath with or without chest discomfort
- Other signs including breaking out in a cold sweat, nausea or lightheadedness

### Warning Signs of Stroke:

- Sudden weakness or numbness of the face, arm or leg, especially on one side of the body
- Sudden confusion, trouble speaking or understanding
- Sudden trouble seeing in one or both eyes
- Sudden trouble walking, dizziness, loss of balance or coordination
- Sudden, severe headache with no known cause

Learn to recognize a stroke. Time lost is brain lost.

Call 9-1-1... Get to a hospital immediately if you experience signs of a heart attack or stroke!

## Do you have questions or comments for your doctor or nurse?

- Take a few minutes to write your own questions for the next time you see your healthcare provider. For example:

Where can I take a CPR class?

Can I help with rehabilitation?