

# Anxiety Post-Stroke

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## Abstract

Around 20% of those who have had a stroke present with anxiety or anxiety-related symptoms along with change in quality of life and course of treatment of the stroke. This session will provide an overview of anxiety and anxiety-related disorders in post stroke patients while providing detail into defining characteristics of the disorder. Research related to causes, overall changes in patient emotional state and quality of life will be discussed. This session will also include information related to incidence of anxiety post-stroke and how this alters both the brain and the course of treatment of stroke. It will also discuss effective treatments to treat anxiety in stroke patients including psychological and pharmaceutical intervention.

## Learning Objectives

1. Explain anxiety and other post-stroke related mental health issues.
2. Discuss symptoms and indicators of post-stroke anxiety and how it affects quality of life in these patients.
3. Assess methods of how to treat anxiety post-stroke, as well as improve quality of life with patients with post-stroke anxiety.

## Overview

- “Anxiety refers to multiple mental and physiological phenomena, including a person’s conscious state of worry over a future unwanted event, or fear of an actual situation.”
- Approximately 20% of stroke survivors present with some level of anxiety.
- Patients with acute frontal lobe infarction are more likely to have post-stroke anxiety.
- Anxiety can be divided into two subtypes:
  - Phobic
  - Generalized
- Phobic anxiety is the predominant anxiety subtype post-stroke.

(Chun, H.Y, 2018; Chun, H.Y., 2018; Evans, 2006; Knapp, 2017; Tang WK, 2012)

## Risk Factors

Post-Stroke anxiety risk factors include prior:

- Preexisting depression or anxiety
- Cognitive impairment
- Fatigue
- Age
- Sex (females at higher risk)
- Lesion location
- Sleep disturbance

(Schottke & Giabbiconi, 2015; Wei Li, 2019; )

## Symptoms of Post-Stroke Anxiety

To be diagnosed with post stroke anxiety, one must present with: excessive anxiousness or worry, and difficulty controlling worry along with at least 3 of the following symptoms:

1. Restlessness
2. Decreased energy
3. Poor concentration
4. Irritation
5. Nervous tension
6. Insomnia

- Patients who experience post-stroke anxiety may also experience:
  - Co-occurring post-stroke depression
  - Co-occurring post-traumatic stress disorder.
- There is a high correlation between prevalence of both post-stroke anxiety and depression.
- Patients with these mental health disorders display lower overall function, lower quality of life, and are less likely to return to work.
- Recovering stroke patients have been found to have anxiety related to, “recurrence of stroke, ability to return to work, and possibility of future falls, which has correlated to reduced quality of life.

(Kim, J.S, 2016; Rafsten, 2018.; Stein, 2018)

## Intervention

- Post-stroke anxiety treatments include pharmaceutical intervention (antidepressants or anxiety reducing drugs) and relaxation or psychological therapy to reduce the effects of post-stroke anxiety.
- To determine effective measures of treatment for stroke patients, it is imperative to understand the factors associated with post-stroke anxiety or depression.
- Due to impact of anxiety and depression on patients, it is important for clinicians to identify these patients due to possible negative effects on patient mood.

(Barker-Collo, 2007; Knapp, 2017; Thayabaranathan, 2018,)

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## Disclosure Statement

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