

Spring 2025

Stroke News

For everyone affected by stroke

'Be patient, take it one step at a time and don't give up.'

Colt on his journey back to life.

This issue:

- Advice on swallowing problems after stroke.
- Coping with grief after your stroke.
- Financial support for carers.

Stroke
Association

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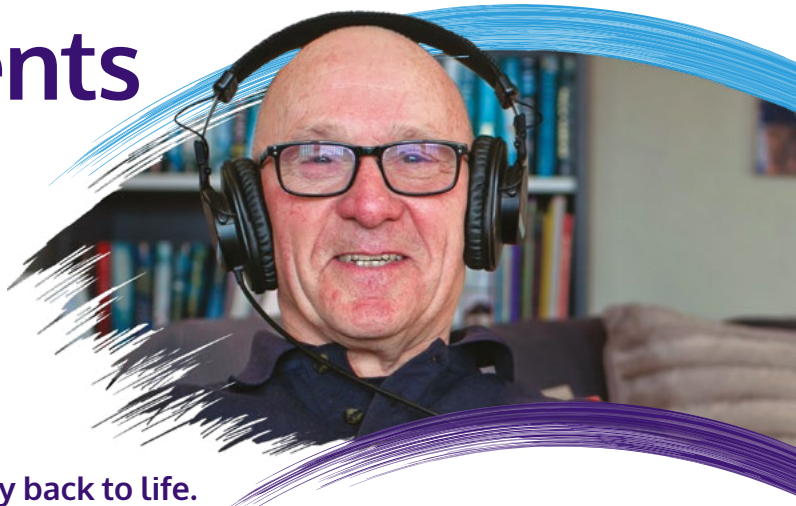
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Contents



Features

8 **Colt's journey back to life.**

Colt shares how setting goals and getting support, including from his dog Nyx, helped him find strength during recovery.

16 **Finding your voice.**

Paul tells us how singing helps his speech.

32 **New study may help treat post-stroke fatigue.**

Find out more about Dr Ali Ali and Professor Arshad Majid's potentially life-changing research.

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Guidance

14 Swallowing problems after stroke.

42 Coping with grief after your stroke.

44 Financial support for carers.

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Editor's letter

A stroke can change everything. Colt, our cover star, wanted to go back to how he was before his stroke. But with support from his partner Jessica and his dog Nyx, he found the strength to keep working on his recovery (page 8).

Paul, whose stroke affected his speech, shares how singing helped him find his voice again (page 16). We also hear from Sue, who tells us why she's campaigning to ensure stroke survivors get the support and treatment they need (page 20).

Judith felt isolated after returning home from hospital, but weekly calls from one of our trained volunteers helped her feel more connected (page 24). Alastair, who retired as a professor after his stroke, tells us he continues to explore



his love of learning through gardening (page 38).

Volunteers David and Sarah also share their stories. David was awarded a British Empire Medal for his services to stroke survivors and their carers across North Wales (page 28). Sarah, a stroke survivor, started a sports club to help other survivors stay active and improve their wellbeing (page 49).

This is my final issue as editor. Thank you for reading Stroke News – it's been a huge honour sharing stroke stories with you.

Agnessa Kasumyan, Editor

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Over to you

Naomi Graham's story in the winter edition of Stroke News really resonated with me. Reading about her experiences reminded me of my own journey as a childhood stroke survivor.

I'm nearly 65 years old now, but I had two strokes – one at nine and one at 11. I never got full use of my left hand back and still experience left-side weakness, but I can walk using an aid and I'm very independent.

My stroke turned my family's life upside down and I know I've been able to live a full life due to their incredible support. I earned

a university degree, travelled a lot and had a successful career in London for over 30 years. My older brother supported me as a child and still does today. My strokes actually inspired him to become a doctor. He's retired now, but his son is also a doctor and his grandson aspires to be one.

Stroke is life-changing, but it doesn't have to stop you from living your life. If I've learned anything, it's that the future doesn't have to be bleak because you've had a stroke.

James Whiteoak

Stroke Support Helpline: **0303 3033 100**

Find your local services, clubs and groups: **stroke.org.uk/support**

Join our Online Community: **onlinecommunity.stroke.org.uk**

Find information about stroke: **stroke.org.uk/publications**

Do you have something to share?



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From our Chief Executive

For many, surviving a stroke is just the start of a long and gruelling recovery journey. With the right support and specialist treatment, stroke survivors can achieve the best possible recovery.

Sadly, thousands don't get vital support. Stroke prevention, treatment and care vary significantly depending on where you live, deepening health inequalities.

As the UK Government prepares its 10-Year Health Plan to introduce healthcare reforms in England, we have a rare opportunity to help shape the future of stroke. Collaborating with stroke survivors, researchers and experts, we developed a new report called 'Unlocking potential: a bold vision for stroke care in England'. This report sets out policy recommendations

to improve stroke prevention, treatment and support over the next 10 years (see page 20).

Stroke is preventable, treatable and recoverable – but the next decade is critical. The Government must act now to ensure a future where every stroke survivor gets the support they need.

Our response to the 10-Year Health Plan is just one way we're advocating for better stroke care across the UK. Next year's elections in Scotland and Wales are great opportunities to make stroke a higher priority, while our Saving Brains campaign in Northern Ireland highlights the need for better thrombectomy services. Help us influence change by joining our Campaigns Network at stroke.org.uk/campaigns

Juliet Bouverie OBE

Colt's journey **back to life**

In September 2023, Colt Burrus woke up in hospital with a severe headache, unaware that he had just survived two strokes and a craniotomy – a procedure where part of the skull is temporarily removed to relieve pressure on the brain and reduce swelling.

'Everything was a blur,' says Colt. 'I have no clear memory of what happened. I just woke up and a part of my skull was missing. My partner, Jessica, tried to explain, but I felt confused by all the medication I was on and couldn't process what she was saying.'

Colt was in hospital for nine months, recovering from both the physical and cognitive effects of stroke. These included left-side paralysis and aphasia, a condition that impacts speech and communication.

'It was an extremely challenging time for me,' he says. 'The stroke impacted me in so many ways, and I struggled with my mental health. I couldn't even look in the mirror. With my left-

side paralysis and part of my skull missing, I didn't recognise myself anymore.

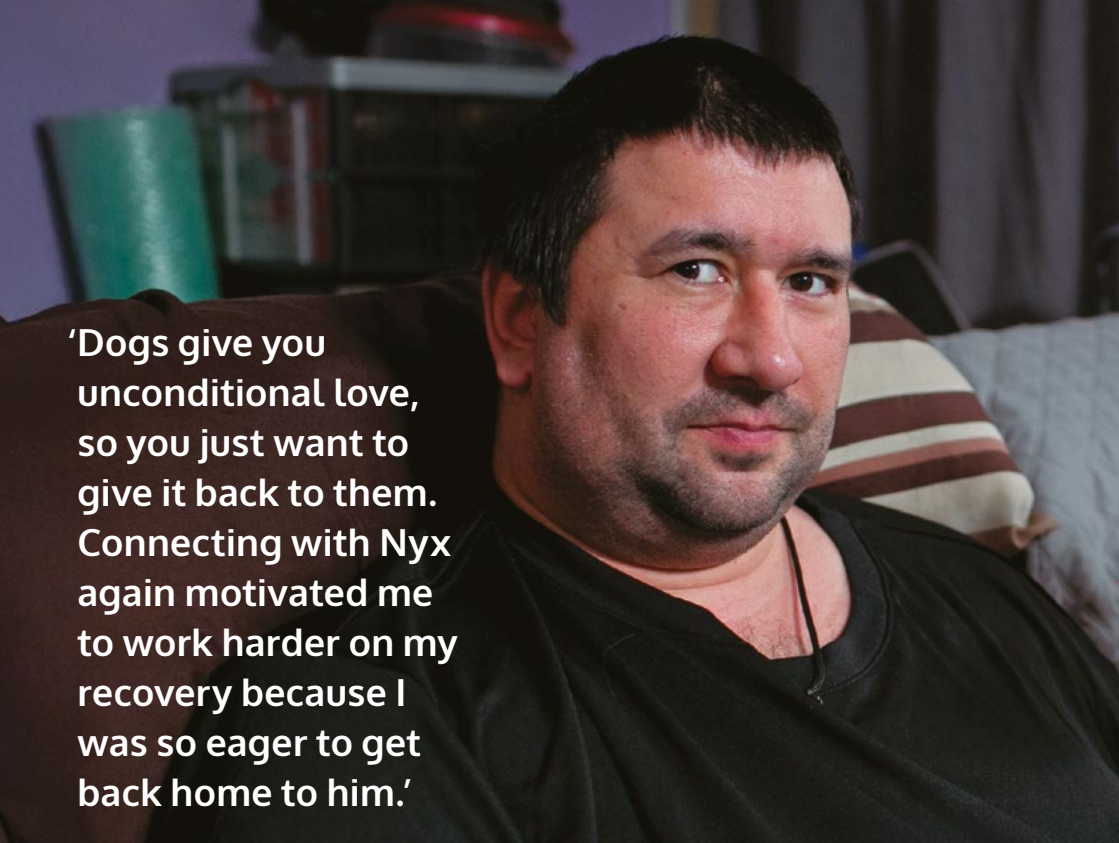
'I just wanted to go back to how I was before the stroke. I couldn't eat, walk or talk the way I used to.

'Talking was particularly difficult. Because of my left-sided weakness, I'd dribble whenever I concentrated on saying something. I knew what I wanted to say, but I couldn't get the words out. I'd get frustrated when people told me that I didn't make sense because I thought I did.

'A stroke also affects your pitch, so even when I could speak, I was very monotone and I didn't sound like myself.'

A man with dark hair and a mustache, wearing a black t-shirt, stands in a room. Behind him are shelves with various items, including a gold figurine, and framed pictures on the wall. The lighting is soft, and the overall tone is personal and candid.

'I just wanted to go back
to how I was before the
stroke. I couldn't eat,
walk or talk the way
I used to.'



'Dogs give you unconditional love, so you just want to give it back to them. Connecting with Nyx again motivated me to work harder on my recovery because I was so eager to get back home to him.'

For Colt, being away from his dog, Nyx, made recovery even more challenging.

'We were together almost all the time for the first year of his life. Then, suddenly, I couldn't be with him at all,' he says.

A few months into his rehabilitation, hospital staff allowed Nyx to visit Colt's ward, hoping it would improve his wellbeing and encourage his recovery.

'We all saw an incredible difference in him after Nyx's visit,' says Jessica. 'He was so much more upbeat and motivated the following day. He was feeling down again a few days later, but Nyx's next visit cheered him up. The hospital then allowed Nyx to visit every week.'

Nyx motivated Colt to engage more with his rehabilitation, including physiotherapy and speech and language therapy.



'Dogs give you unconditional love, so you just want to give it back to them,' says Colt. 'Connecting with Nyx again motivated me to work harder on my recovery because I was so eager to get back home to him. I put more effort into my physiotherapy, and Nyx even helped me improve my speech.'

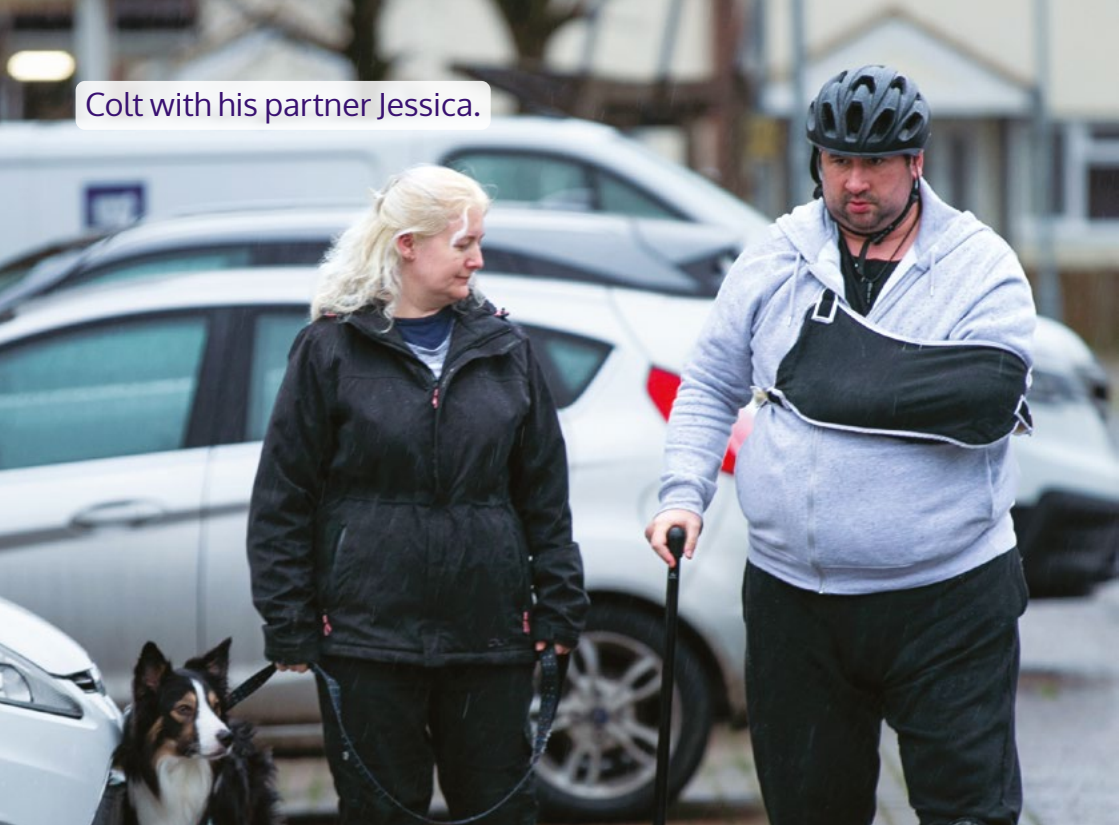
'You can't talk to a dog in one tone – you have to raise or lower your pitch, depending on what you want them to do. With Nyx,

I was so excited talking to him that my pitch was always going up. I began to sound less monotone.'

'I was more determined than ever to return home. Even though I still couldn't walk at the time, I promised myself that I'd be able to walk out of hospital. It took several months of hard work, but I achieved that goal.'

Setting goals and finding new ways to approach things have been key to Colt's recovery.'

Colt with his partner Jessica.



'Once you start doing things, you realise it's possible,' he says. 'I'm no longer focused on getting back to the way I was. I'm just trying to find ways to be comfortable with who I am now. I've had to give up some of my hobbies, like gaming, because I still can't use my left arm, but I've discovered new ones.'

'I've started building with Lego bricks, which has helped me a lot. You can do it with one hand and it's mentally stimulating

because you're concentrating on following instructions and putting something together.'

Once home, Colt and Jessica got in touch with the Stroke Association to help them navigate life after stroke.

'The Stroke Association's support services are crucial for survivors and their families,' says Jessica. 'Michelle, our Stroke Support Coordinator, came to our house and shared



'I'm no longer focused on getting back to the way I was. I'm just trying to find ways to be comfortable with who I am now.'

valuable information about stroke, helping us understand its impacts better. She also introduced us to the charity's website and all the different services available.'

Although Colt is still learning to adapt to life after stroke and still has some challenges to overcome, he's more hopeful about his future.

'Early on in my recovery, I was impatient and just wanted

to be able to do everything immediately, but that wasn't possible,' he says. 'Be patient, take it one step at a time and don't give up.'



We're here to support everyone affected by stroke. Visit **stroke.org.uk/support** for more information.

Swallowing problems after stroke

Dysphagia, or swallowing problems, is common after a stroke. It usually improves within a few weeks, but it can last longer for some people and impact wellbeing. The good news is that there are things that may help.

Hema from our Stroke Support Helpline answers some commonly asked questions.

Why can't I swallow?

Your brain needs to coordinate many different muscles for you to swallow. Stroke can affect the parts of your brain that control this, impacting your ability to swallow.

Can swallowing problems affect my health?

Swallowing problems can affect your health in different ways. If you can't swallow correctly, then food, drink and saliva can enter your airways and lungs. This is called aspiration.

Because your mouth contains a lot of bacteria, aspiration can cause lung infections like

pneumonia. Brushing your teeth after every meal can help prevent bacteria from building up and reduce the risk of infections.

Swallowing problems can also lead to weight loss because you may not be getting enough nutrients. If this happens, it's important to speak to a healthcare professional, such as a dietician, speech and language therapist (SLT), stroke nurse or your GP. They can give you specialist advice to help you maintain a healthy weight.

Is there treatment that can help?

Swallowing problems can improve. If you're finding it difficult to swallow, you may be referred to an SLT. As well as supporting people with speech



and language difficulties, SLTs are trained to help with swallowing problems.

Your SLT will complete an assessment to understand exactly what's going on. Once they know this, they can talk to you and your loved ones about the best ways to manage dysphagia.

You SLT may recommend different things for you to try, such as:

- Changing your diet.
- Learning techniques that can help you swallow.
- Using aids that can help you eat or drink more easily.

Your SLT may also show you exercises to strengthen the muscles in your throat, face and mouth, which can help you swallow better and protect your airways.



Visit **stroke.org.uk/dysphagia** for more information. You can also contact our Stroke Support Helpline by emailing **helpline@stroke.org.uk** or calling **0303 3033 100**.

Finding **your** voice

Many stroke survivors experience aphasia, affecting their ability to speak and communicate. However, some find that music and singing offer a unique path to recovery. Because singing is processed in different parts of the brain than spoken language, it's sometimes easier to sing than to speak.

For stroke survivor Paul Perkins, 68, singing has helped him find his voice again.

A carpenter from Oxfordshire, Paul was having tea with a client when he collapsed from a stroke in April 2023. He woke up in hospital three days later, unable to speak.

'At first, I couldn't talk at all,' he says. 'It was a very difficult time for me. I became quite frustrated and aggressive. I knew what words I wanted to say, but they wouldn't come out.'

Miriam, Paul's partner, often played music for him while he recovered in hospital, hoping this would cheer him up.

'He was against it initially but I didn't know why,' says Miriam. 'Later in his recovery, he told me it was because he always loved singing along to his favourite songs and worried that music would remind him of everything he couldn't do anymore.'

'I still played songs for him in the background. One day, 'Can't Help Falling in Love' by Elvis Presley came on and Paul started singing out of the blue. It was such a surprising and emotional moment.'

For Paul, it felt like a breakthrough in his recovery.

'As the words came back to me, I started to feel like myself



again,' he says. 'I still struggle with my speech, but singing has given me the confidence to keep trying. I find ways to practice every day.'

'I prefer slow songs, especially by Elvis, because they're easier to follow. 'Suspicious Minds' and 'Where No One Stands Alone' are some of my favourites.'

'Music helps me practice and improve my reading as well. With the slower songs,

I can read the lyrics more easily as I'm singing. I find the songs online and try to read along.'

Paul and Miriam also incorporated singing into his speech therapy.

'We'd make up games and sing the answers to each other,' says Miriam. 'There's something about the rhythm of singing that makes it easier for Paul to get the words out.'

Miriam and Paul, with their dog Monty.



'We also came across Stroke Association leaflets while Paul was still in hospital and learned about all the different support services available to us, including local stroke support groups. Paul joined a couple and they're a big part of his life now. One of the groups even begins with a singing session to help with speech.'

During his free time, Paul also volunteers at Abingdon Community Hospital's stroke unit, helping other stroke survivors on their recovery journey by encouraging them to sing.

'I really want to support others in any way that I can,' he says. 'I visit the stroke unit once a week and organise singing lessons for some of the patients. We get



together, play something on YouTube and just follow along.

'All they want to do is communicate by singing. It's so rewarding to see the joy on their faces.'



This May, you can help us support stroke survivors by participating in our Sing4Stroke fundraiser. Sing solo or in a group, and have your loved ones sponsor you to sing your favourite songs. Share your video online with the hashtag **#sing4stroke**. Visit **stroke.org.uk/sing** to sign up or find out more.

Sing4Stroke is part of our series of fundraising events for Stroke Awareness Month, which takes place every May. Check out **stroke.org.uk/awareness** to learn more.

Shaping the future of stroke

Over the next 10 years, the UK Government plans to adapt the NHS in England to meet future healthcare needs. To help with this, it invited the public, healthcare professionals and experts to share their views and ideas for its 10-Year Health Plan.

In response, we launched a new report called 'Unlocking potential: a bold vision for stroke care in England'. We worked with stroke survivors, researchers and specialists to develop policy recommendations aimed at improving stroke care and support.

The 10-Year Health Plan doesn't focus on specific conditions, but we want to make sure that stroke care is represented in wider plans to improve healthcare. Our recommendations align with the Government's main priorities – prevention, community-based care and digital innovation – to help prevent strokes, save lives and improve recovery outcomes.

Right now, stroke care varies significantly depending on where you live. But getting the right treatment and rehabilitation can save lives and reduce disability. One of our key recommendations is prioritising community rehabilitation and life after stroke (LAS) services – no matter where you live.

The next decade is critical. Now is the time for bold action. As the Government shapes its 10-Year Health Plan for England, it has a rare opportunity to make stroke a higher priority. Stroke is preventable, treatable and recoverable. Together, we can ensure a future where every stroke survivor receives the care and support they need to thrive.



Why stroke support matters – Sue's story

Surviving a stroke is just the start of a long recovery journey. Access to specialist stroke rehabilitation and community LAS support can be life-changing.

For Sue McAlpine, 60, it made all the difference.

In March 2023, Sue had such a severe stroke that doctors didn't think she would survive.

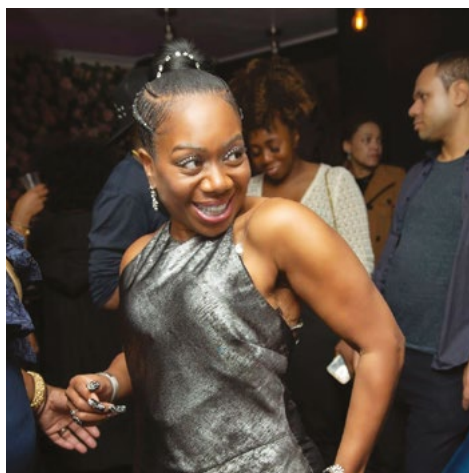


Photo: Junior Watson (Watson Media)



'I woke up one morning with an awful headache, unlike anything I'd ever experienced before,' she says. 'I tried shouting for my roommate, but my voice wouldn't come out. I managed to call my daughter and quietly tell her that I was having a stroke. As soon as I did, I collapsed. I don't remember anything after that.'

Sue was rushed to Charing Cross Hospital in London, where she was in a coma for 10 days.

'I'll never forget the moment I woke up,' she says. 'I was disoriented and confused. The right side of my body felt so heavy, and I could barely move. At that point, I'd been a fitness instructor for 30 years. I was always fit and healthy, so I just couldn't believe that this was my body.'

Sue spent three months recovering at Hillingdon Hospital's rehabilitation unit.

'My doctors told me that I had a long recovery journey ahead of me, but I've always been

positive and motivated,' she says. 'I didn't want the stroke to define me, so I knew it was important to try my absolute best.'

'I owe so much to my physiotherapists because they played such an important role in my recovery. While in hospital, I had physiotherapy five days a week. I did a lot of exercises, including step turns, to help me walk and improve movement in my hand.'

Sue's treatment continued once she was discharged from hospital.

'My physiotherapist was incredible. She created a plan with specific goals, like going up the stairs and walking from my house to the pet shop. It took a long time, but I eventually did it!

'In the end, I received about six months of physiotherapy. It was crucial to my recovery that I continued receiving treatment once I was discharged and back in the community.'

Eager to support other stroke survivors, Sue began sharing videos and pictures of her recovery on her personal blog, which helped her realise how many stroke survivors struggle to get treatment and support after returning home.

‘It wasn’t until I spoke to other survivors that I realised LAS and rehabilitation services like physiotherapy all depend on where you live and what’s available. I thought they were guaranteed, but they’re not,’ she says.

‘All stroke survivors should have access to the same level of support and treatment as I did. This will make it more possible for them to achieve their best possible recovery.



‘This is why I’ve joined the Stroke Association’s campaign to make stroke a higher priority. I hope my experiences show why it’s so important for everyone affected by long-term conditions like stroke to get the treatment and support they need, regardless of where they live.’



You can join Sue and help us make stroke a higher priority for the UK Government by joining our Campaigns Network. Visit **stroke.org.uk/Campaigns** to sign up and read our full report on better stroke prevention, treatment and care.

Connecting with someone who understands stroke

Stroke can feel isolating, but connecting with someone who understands what you're going through can support your recovery.

Former GP Judith Graham had only been retired for nine months when she had a stroke at her own New Year's Eve party in 2022.

'A stroke is a major, life-changing event. I went from having an active social life and keeping busy with hobbies like swimming to spending three months recovering in hospital,' says Judith.

'Initially, I couldn't walk at all, and I lost full use of my right arm. Thankfully, I can get around more easily now using a walking aid, but my arm hasn't fully recovered.'

Although Judith had great support in hospital, she felt isolated once she was discharged.

'I felt like I was on my own and didn't realise how much the stroke impacted my social life and independence until I got home. Managing a household with reduced mobility is very challenging – things like changing bed sheets, cooking and doing the weekly shopping suddenly aren't as straightforward as they used to be,' she says.

'The Stroke Association was a huge help. My Stroke Support Coordinators, Katherine and



Amanda, offered various suggestions to help me cope with my challenges. For instance, I struggle with cooking due to my right arm, but they referred me to grants for special chopping boards that keep the food in place.

'I also shared that I was feeling isolated, and they connected me to a trained volunteer. I had a weekly phone call with someone who understood what I was going through.

'My family live abroad and, while I have wonderful friends,

'The calls made a big difference in the first few months after my stroke. It's such an important service, especially for people who may be socially isolated.'

people my age are usually busy with grandchildren. In the early days of my recovery, travelling to see people wasn't an option either.

'Speaking one-on-one with another stroke survivor gave me the connection and support I really needed.'



'It took me six months just to be able to walk to the bus stop, so I couldn't meet with people easily.

'Speaking one-on-one with another stroke survivor gave me the connection and support I really needed. I knew that I could talk to someone about how I was feeling and rely on them to call me back the following week.

'I was matched with a younger survivor who not only made

me feel less alone but also really inspired me. Hearing her story gave me hope for my own recovery. I realised that I could continue improving, which encouraged me to keep trying, especially with physiotherapy. I always felt motivated after our chats.

'The calls made a big difference in the first few months after my stroke. It's such an important service, especially for people who may be socially isolated.'



If you or someone you know has had a stroke, a weekly phone conversation with one of our trained volunteers can support you to find your strength while you recover. Visit stroke.org.uk/weekly-volunteer-calls to sign up for friendly chats or to volunteer.

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Group

Raising awareness in North Wales

Volunteers play a huge role in providing stroke survivors and their loved ones with vital support. They help us deliver services, raise awareness and connect with local communities so we can reach even more people.

David Bone, from Denbigh, has volunteered for the Stroke Association for over 13 years. His dedication to supporting stroke survivors and their carers earned him a British Empire Medal when he was recognised in the King's New Year Honours List 2025.

'I knew nothing about it,' he says. 'Somebody in the charity nominated me, which means a lot. It's wonderful being recognised by the team you work so closely with.'

David's journey as a volunteer began in 2007 when his wife, Anne, had a stroke.

'It was shocking,' says David. 'Our lives suddenly changed. When we returned home from hospital, I realised Anne needed a lot of support, and that I'd be taking on most of the responsibilities at home and at work.'

'We ran our own marketing and communications business, had pets to look after and the usual shared jobs, such as house chores. I was also supporting Anne's recovery as her carer. I was more than happy to do it, but I was concerned that I wouldn't be able to manage everything on my own.'



Stroke Association
volunteer David Bone.

‘Eventually, I learned to ask for help.’

A Stroke Support Coordinator from the Stroke Association helped David and Anne find the right support.

‘Anne and I were very grateful,’ he says. ‘We knew nothing about the post-stroke world or where to go for help, so the charity provided the guidance we really needed.’

After retiring, David wanted to support other stroke survivors and their families.

‘I went to the Stroke Association and told them I’d like to volunteer. I met the charity’s director in Wales, and we talked about ways to raise awareness of stroke and the charity. Using my background in communications, I began writing stories and getting them into local papers in North Wales.’



David and Engagement Officer Colin Evans visiting one of our information points at Llandudno General Hospital.

'I also suggested setting up information points across the region so people could learn more about stroke and the charity's support services. Our first stand was in a town called Caerwys, where a local newsagent agreed to put one up. Since then, we've introduced them in every major hospital in North Wales.'

Now, David volunteers as a Stroke Association Community

Connector, raising awareness by building relationships with local communities and organisations. He currently represents the charity on the Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board, collaborating on the Carer Education Programme.

'I meet with carers to help them prepare for their new role,' he says. 'They suddenly have to navigate life after stroke for themselves and their loved ones. I remind them that they don't have to do everything on their own. I also give them practical advice, like pointing them to the Stroke Association's community support services, as well as local groups and clubs. The world doesn't stop just because someone you love has had a stroke, but knowing there's support available can make a big difference.'

'It's incredibly rewarding talking to people and knowing that I can use my personal experience to help them.'



If you'd like to become a Community Connector, visit stroke.org.uk/community to see opportunities in your area.



How can texture-modified meals help those recovering from a stroke enjoy food again?

By Sophia Cornelius, Development Dietitian at Wiltshire Farm Foods.

Dysphagia, or difficulty swallowing, is very common among stroke survivors.

One way to manage dysphagia is by modifying foods and fluids so they require less chewing and are easier to swallow. Depending on the severity of dysphagia, food may be modified to a completely smooth texture that doesn't require chewing. This can reduce the risk of aspiration or choking.

While changing to a texture-modified diet can be a difficult adjustment at first, there are several benefits. Dysphagia can make eating painful, but soft or blended meals may help ease discomfort. They're also easier to control in the mouth, which may benefit those whose stroke

has affected their ability to chew or close their mouth.

Many people affected by dysphagia also experience fatigue while eating. Nutritionally dense, texture-modified foods require less effort to consume, helping to prevent fatigue and ensuring that every bite counts.

Pre-prepared meals can take away the stress of making a safe, texture-modified meal. They also offer flavours that may otherwise be challenging to prepare safely at home.

For many, sharing a meal with loved ones is an important part of the day. Texture-modified meals can help you dine with dignity and make mealtimes more enjoyable again.

Reference: Smithard DG, Smeeton NC, Wolfe CDA. Long-term outcome after stroke: does dysphagia matter? Age Ageing. 2007 Jan;36(1):90-4. doi: 10.1093/ageing/af1149.



To view the new Purée range from Wiltshire Farm Foods
visit <https://wiltshirefarmfoods.com/new-puree-menu>



New study may help treat post-stroke fatigue

Many stroke survivors struggle with persistent fatigue. Unlike everyday tiredness, post-stroke fatigue (PSF) rarely improves with rest and can significantly impact daily life and wellbeing.



There are currently no available treatments for PSF. However, stroke clinician Dr Ali Ali and neurologist Professor Arshad Majid are determined to change that. Together, they're leading a research project that investigates whether remote ischaemic conditioning (RIC) can treat PSF. RIC is a technique that

involves briefly but repeatedly altering blood supply to one arm using a blood pressure cuff.

'RIC sounds alarming, but our limbs are used to short periods of reduced blood flow,' says Dr Ali. 'We think this stimulates changes in the body that help create energy more efficiently.'

A pilot study has already revealed promising results. After six weeks of regular sessions, participants reported lower levels of fatigue.

'One individual told us that he was able to run again for the first time since his stroke,' says Dr Ali. 'He was very active before his stroke, so that was a huge achievement for him. Another participant could talk to her friends again without feeling exhausted. These may seem



Dr Ali at Sheffield Teaching Hospitals.

like small milestones, but they can really improve wellbeing.'

With funding from the Stroke Association, Dr Ali and Professor Majid are now running a larger trial with 60 participants to better understand how RIC can help treat PSF and to assess its effectiveness on a broader scale.

'Although the pilot study showed us that RIC can be effective in treating PSF, we don't fully understand why,' says Dr Ali. 'This trial lets us investigate what's happening at a cellular level so we can learn more

about how RIC works and to see if it can be used as a reliable treatment for PSF.

'The impact of PSF on wellbeing and recovery is something I hear about too often when working with stroke survivors. Unfortunately, I can't offer them much advice beyond recognising when they're tired, resting and pacing themselves.

'In the past, fatigue hasn't been talked about or researched enough, partly because it's so complex and therefore difficult to treat.

'Some people experience mental fatigue, feeling exhausted after concentrating on something for too long. For others, the effects are more physical. Everyday tasks like getting out of bed or climbing stairs can be draining.'

'Our research into RIC could give healthcare professionals the chance to provide stroke survivors with a more effective, long-term solution to PSF. If our research is successful, it could transform the lives of stroke survivors. It's a low-cost treatment that survivors can do on their own once they receive training.'

'This wouldn't be possible without funding from the Stroke Association. We've made amazing breakthroughs in stroke treatment over the last 30 years, and much of that is due to organisations like the Stroke Association that support groundbreaking research.'

Visit stroke.org.uk/research to learn more about the research we fund or how to get involved in research studies. Please email RICFAST2@sheffield.ac.uk if you live in Yorkshire and would like to participate in Dr Ali's RICFAST trials.



Please don't try this treatment without training from a researcher or healthcare professional experienced in RIC.

Supporting stroke research

We're committed to funding research to build our understanding of stroke and to improve treatment, care and quality of life for everyone affected.

If you can, please support others whose lives have been changed by stroke. You can make a donation by visiting **stroke.org.uk/donating**, by calling us on **0300 3300 740** or by completing the form below.

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Please detach this form and return it to us using the envelope enclosed, or post it to:
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Chippenham SN14 6NG**



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Gardening after stroke

In 2022, retired professor Alastair Mullis had a stroke that changed everything.

‘It has impacted my life in every way,’ he says. ‘I used to feel invincible – like I could do anything. Then suddenly I couldn’t.

‘My stroke was very big. I spent three weeks in primary care and another ten weeks in rehabilitation. At first, I couldn’t walk or talk at all. I still struggle with my speech, coordination, drinking and eating. But I’m very thankful to be alive.’

One of Alastair’s biggest challenges has been dysarthria, a speech disorder that makes it difficult to speak due to problems controlling muscles in the face, mouth and throat.

‘People don’t know what to think when they speak to him,’ says Camilla, Alastair’s wife. ‘They assume he’s had speech difficulties his entire life. Sometimes people think he lacks intelligence because of the way he talks, which is really troubling and upsetting.’

A respected legal scholar and professor, Alastair led a busy and active life before his stroke. He served as the Head of the School of Law at the University of Leeds from 2013 and, in 2019, became the Dean of the Faculty of Social Sciences.

‘I’ve been an academic for most of my life,’ says Alastair. ‘I’ve always loved learning and exploring new ideas, but I had to retire early because of my stroke, which was very difficult for me.’



Adjusting to a quieter life after stroke was challenging, but Alastair discovered that gardening was a great way for him to keep his mind active and continue learning.

'There are thousands of plants you can learn about. If I plant something and it dies, I can ask questions and work out why. If a plant does well, I can do the same,' he says.

'With roses, for instance, I've learned that it helps to plant them in larger pots so that the roots have plenty of room to grow. I also trim them regularly to remove damaged parts, which encourages healthier blooms. Recently, I planted a couple of the Stroke Association's 'Believe in Yourself' roses, and they bloomed twice. They have a very vibrant, dark pink colour.

'I'm lucky to have a space where I can garden and experiment with different plants. It keeps me active mentally and physically.

'It also gets me outside. I love visiting the countryside and

exploring other gardens for inspiration.'

Camilla says that gardening has been a vital part of Alastair's recovery.

'He's always had a curious mind,' she says. 'It's really important for him to have a hobby that stimulates him mentally and allows him to continue exploring his curiosity.'

For Alastair, gardening has also been a great way to connect with others.

'As someone who worked at a university, I used to meet and talk to people all the time, but that changed after I retired,' he says. 'Stroke can be very isolating. I found myself spending most of my time at home or in the garden. But when I'm out and about, gardening is a great way to start a conversation and find common ground with people. It gives you something to talk about. It's really allowed me to connect with people and nature in a new way.'



We've partnered with Blue Diamond Garden Centres to raise vital funds for the Stroke Association. Our 'Believe in Yourself' charity rose is a compact, bee-friendly shrub rose that grows 50 to 80 cm in height. You can plant it in your garden or gift it to a loved one. For every 'Believe in Yourself' rose sold, Blue Diamond Garden Centres will donate £1 to the Stroke Association. Visit stroke.org.uk/CharityRose to get your rose.

Coping with grief after your stroke

A stroke can impact every part of your life. Everyday tasks like getting dressed, going to work or having conversations might feel more challenging. You may even have had to step back from your career or let go of your favourite hobbies.

These changes can bring feelings of shock, anger, sadness and a sense of loss. People tell us they sometimes feel grief if their life feels very different after a stroke.

Many stroke survivors experience grief, but there are ways to cope. Here are some tips that may help.



Acknowledge your feelings

It's important to acknowledge how you're feeling, even if only to yourself. You might feel pressure to 'move on' and dismiss your emotions. But recognising your feelings can be an important first step in your recovery. Ignoring them can make it harder to cope and impact your wellbeing.



Many stroke survivors feel guilty for grieving, thinking they should be grateful for surviving or not 'having it worse'. But it's okay to feel grief or to struggle with your emotions, no matter where you are in your recovery.



Get support

Talking about grief can be difficult, especially if you're worried about overwhelming your loved ones. But expressing your feelings can help you adjust to life changes after stroke. Organisations like the Samaritans offer free emotional support. Visit **samaritans.org** to connect with someone who will listen to you and help you talk through any concerns.

You can also contact our Stroke Support Helpline for more information, guidance or a chat. Just email **helpline@stroke.org.uk** or call **0303 3033 100**.

A counsellor or therapist can also support you. In England, you can refer yourself to NHS talking therapy services. Visit **NHS.uk** to find a service near you.

If you live in Northern Ireland, Scotland or Wales, speak to your GP about a referral.



Connect with other survivors

Other stroke survivors understand what you're going through better than anyone. You can join our Online Community at **onlinecommunity.stroke.org.uk** to connect with people who can relate to your stroke journey.

Stroke support groups are also a great way to connect with other survivors. Visit **stroke.org.uk/groups** to see what's on offer in your local area or online.



Explore new interests

Trying out new interests and hobbies can be a great way to cope with grief. They can help you create new memories, give you a sense of purpose and build your confidence as you develop new skills.



Visit **stroke.org.uk/EmotionalChanges**

to learn more about grief and other difficult feelings you may experience after a stroke.

Financial support for carers



Caring for a loved one can affect your income. You might need to reduce your hours at work or leave your job altogether. This can make it difficult to pay your expenses and cause financial stress, but support may be available if you have a caring role.

Carer's Allowance

Carer's Allowance is the main benefit available for carers. You may be eligible if you care for someone at least 35 hours a week and if they receive certain benefits, such as Personal Independence Payment or Attendance Allowance.

If you live in Scotland, you may qualify for a similar scheme called Carer Support Payment. Visit **gov.uk/carers-allowance** to check your eligibility and find out more. You can also call **0800 7310 297**.



How much is Carer's Allowance?

Carer's Allowance is currently £81.90 per week. To be eligible, you must earn no more than £151 per week after deductions, including tax, national insurance and certain expenses. However, both figures are expected to increase in April 2025. Carer's Allowance is expected to rise

to £83.30 and the earning threshold may be lifted to £196.

If someone else provides care for the same person, only one of you can claim Carer's Allowance.

Carers UK also has more information on Carer's Allowance. Visit carersuk.org to learn more.

Can I get support from an employer?

If you need to work alongside caring for someone, you could make a flexible working request to your employer. Examples of flexible working include changes to:

- The number of hours you work.
- Your start or finish time.
- The days you work.
- Where you work.

Visit gov.uk/flexible-working for more information. Carers UK also has more information to help you understand your rights.

What if I need to leave my job?

Check what help may be available to you under your work pension scheme. If you're not working or claiming Carer's Allowance, you could be eligible for Carer's Credit to protect your state pension. Find out more at gov.uk/carers-credit

What other support is available?

Benefits like Universal Credit and grants and loans are there to help people on a low income. However, the benefits system is complex. It's a good idea to get specialist advice about what you're entitled to and help with completing claim applications. Organisations like Citizens Advice might be able to support you or show you services that can. You can also try using an online benefits checker like turn2us.org.uk to see what you may be entitled to.



Visit stroke.org.uk/financial for more information. You can also contact our Stroke Support Helpline at helpline@stroke.org.uk or 0303 3033 100.

Puzzles



Puzzles can be a fun way to exercise your mind and improve concentration, understanding and memory.

Word search

S	W	B	F	P	D	N	B	T
E	A	R	B	V	E	E	U	K
E	T	F	X	U	Z	T	D	U
D	E	L	R	O	S	E	A	B
W	R	T	X	R	E	H	V	L
N	O	E	K	B	W	O	R	G
Q	U	N	P	B	L	O	O	M
S	I	V	E	R	S	G	U	O
P	B	T	H	O	R	N	K	U

ROSE

BUD

WATER

BUSH

BLOOM

GROW

SEED

THORN

PETAL

PINK

Across

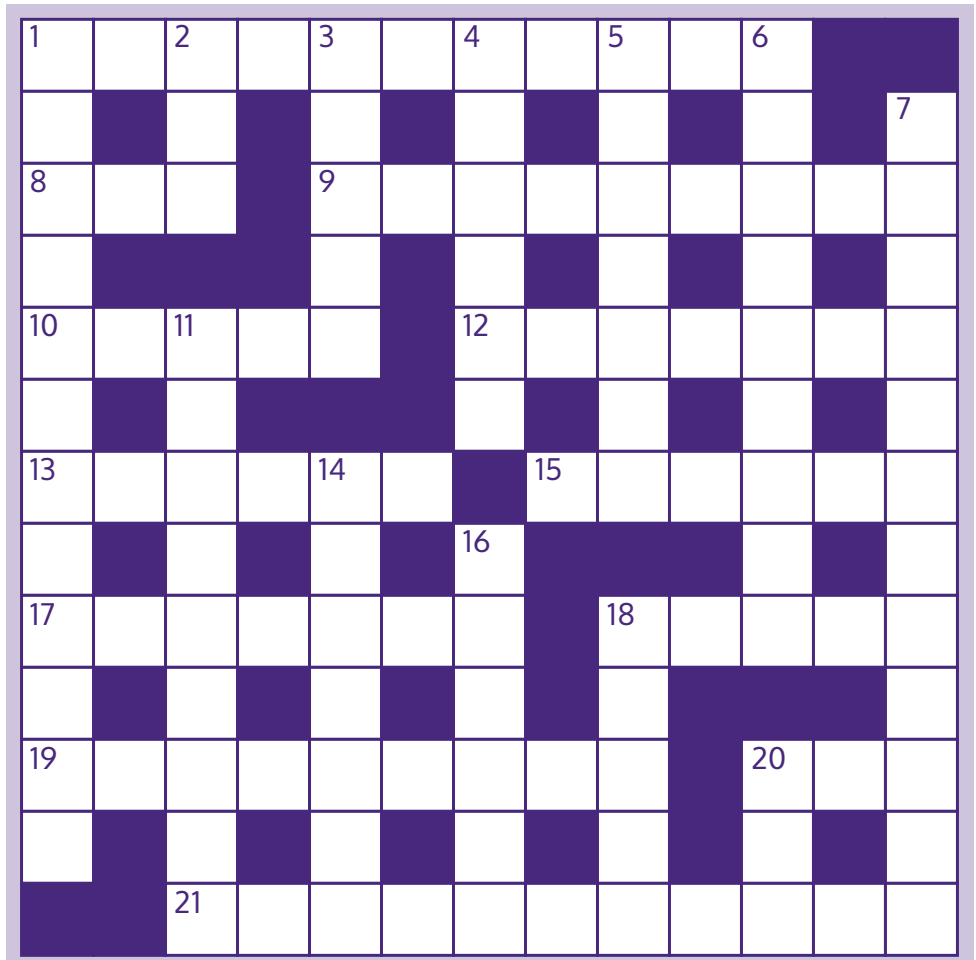
- 1 Tool with spinning teeth (8,3)
- 8 Statute (3)
- 9 Covertly (9)
- 10 Regretful (5)
- 12 Act of self-glorification (3,4)
- 13 Recently (2,4)
- 15 Moral standards (6)
- 17 Varnish (7)
- 18 Arbiter (5)
- 19 Discharge (9)
- 20 Rainy (3)
- 21 Cretaceous herbivore (11)

Lottery

For your chance to win £1,000 every week, play the Stroke Association Weekly Lottery. Find out more at lottery.stroke.org.uk

Down

- | | |
|---------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| 1 Brush off (4-8) | 7 Sane (6,6) |
| 2 Quarrel (3) | 11 Unwilling (9) |
| 3 Consolidate (5) | 14 "Harbour wave" (7) |
| 4 Bowman (6) | 16 Make it (6) |
| 5 Italian lady (7) | 18 Military group in power (5) |
| 6 Collection (4-5) | 20 Court (3) |



With thanks to The Times/News Syndication who granted us rights to this crossword.

Finding strength through support

When a stroke happens, we're here with support for stroke survivors and their families. But we can only continue to provide vital support with your help. A huge thank you to everyone who has gone the extra mile to fundraise, volunteer and campaign with us. Your efforts mean we can reach even more people who need us.



Breckland Brass Band and Watton Silver Band

The two bands joined forces and hosted a charity concert in Elveden, raising £600 for the Stroke Association. Thank you to everyone who participated in the concert, entered the raffle or donated to the event!

Glasgow ScotSTAR

Congratulations to the Scottish Ambulance Service's ScotSTAR team in Glasgow. They completed a running relay of over 240km in 24 hours, raising £7,985 in honour of their colleague Richard, a stroke survivor.



Find out what events we've got coming up on page 50 or visit stroke.org.uk/donation to donate.

How does your donation help?



£10 supports our Stroke Support Helpline to answer a call from someone who urgently needs support after a life-changing stroke.



£25 could be part of a hardship grant for a stroke survivor who is struggling to pay for basics like food and clothing.



£50 could help us be there for children and families through our Childhood Stroke Support.



Ashley Bush

A huge thank you to the amazing Ashley Bush, who raised £1,270 by completing the Yorkshire Three Peaks challenge. He hiked 24.5 miles at an elevation of 7,000 ft. Ashley completed the challenge in honour of his father, who survived two strokes.



Volunteer spotlight

Sarah Luxton began volunteering for the Nailsea Stroke Survivors Club a year after her stroke in October 2020.

'When Lori, our leader, asked me to volunteer, I jumped at the opportunity,' she says. 'I used to be a teacher before the stroke. Volunteering lets me use my skills, organise activities and feel a sense of self-worth again.'

'I started a sports group within the club to help other members stay active, but our sessions are also about social connection. Stroke can make you withdraw, but having a space to meet friends boosts mental wellbeing. I love seeing how our club benefits survivors.'

Visit stroke.org.uk/your-support to find out how you can volunteer.

Join Team Stroke

Get involved and fundraise at home, or join us at exciting events around the UK:



Sip for Stroke

Throughout May

Host a Sip for Stroke fundraiser this May! Pick a date that suits you best, gather your loved ones, and enjoy tasty drinks and treats while raising vital funds for stroke survivors.

Visit **stroke.org.uk/sip** to sign up and get your free digital fundraising pack.

Peak District Challenge

28-29 June 2025

Enjoy stunning views as you walk, jog or run through Peak District National Park. You can take the challenge at a pace that suits you. Get 25% off the registration fee when you sign up for the Stroke Association team at **stroke.org.uk/peak-district-challenge**

Volunteer for Team Stroke

Come along to one of our events to cheer on our Team Stroke runners! After months of training and fundraising, they're running to support people affected by stroke! Visit **stroke.org.uk/JoinUs** to sign up and help us show our appreciation.

See **events.stroke.org.uk** for more ways to get involved in our work.

Crossword solution

Across: 1 Circular saw, 8 Law, 9 Incognito, 10 Sorry, 12 Ego trip, 13 Of late, 15 Values, 17 Lacquer, 18 Judge, 19 Emanation, 20 Wet, 21 Triceratops

Down: 1 Cold-shoulder, 2 Row, 3 Unify, 4 Archer, 5 Signora, 6 Whip-round, 7 Compos mentis, 11 Reluctant, 14 Tsunami, 16 Arrive, 18 Junta, 20 Woo

S	W	B	F	P	D	N	B	T
E	A	R	B	V	E	E	U	K
E	T	F	X	U	Z	T	D	U
D	E	L	R	O	S	E	A	B
W	R	T	X	R	E	H	V	L
N	O	E	K	B	W	O	R	G
Q	U	N	P	B	L	O	O	M
S	I	V	E	R	S	G	U	O
P	B	T	H	O	R	N	K	U

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