

Winter 2025

Stroke News

For everyone affected by stroke

'You need a support squad around you.'

Nicola's experience of managing fatigue and family life

This issue:

- Carers: Looking after your wellbeing
- Understanding emotionalism
- Learn about our Online Community

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Editor's letter



Recovery looks different for everyone, but what connects the stories in this issue is the power of perseverance and community.

Our cover feature follows Nicola (page 8), who, with the support of her family, friends and our Emotional Support Service, is learning to manage the effects of stroke and adapt to a slower pace of life.

We also meet Hannah (page 22), who became her dad's carer at just 24. She shares honest reflections and practical tips for other carers finding their way.

On page 26, Donald and his sister Irene show how fundraising challenges can build strength and confidence. While Rebecca (page 28) discusses how connecting with other stroke survivors online has inspired and motivated her.

Our Stroke Support Helpline also offers help with understanding and managing emotionalism and getting help with your water bills.

I hope these stories inspire you. If you'd like to share your experiences, please get in touch. Enjoy this issue!

Christine Webster, Editor

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Over to you

After my stroke, I was in an induced coma for two weeks. When I woke up, I couldn't read, write or talk – not even 'hello'. I couldn't walk, wash or dress myself. It gets me down thinking back to that time.

My memory was affected. When I first saw my son, I was shocked as I remembered him as 11 years old, not the 44-year-old man he is now!

I had physio, occupational therapy, speech therapy and neuropsychology sessions. I thought I would never recover – but three years on, my confidence has grown.

I enjoy going out and talking with friends. I'm now able to walk (though for longer distances, I use my mobility scooter). I've joined a book club, and have started to read aloud every week.

My next goal is to finish the romance book I was writing before the stroke.

It took a lot of hard work to get here and sometimes I didn't want to do it. But my therapists encouraged me to carry on, and I am so glad I did.

If I can do it, so can you!

Elaine Hodgins

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?



Email **strokenews@stroke.org.uk** or write to us at Stroke News, Stroke Association, 1 Sterling Business Park, Salthouse Road, Brackmills, Northampton, NN4 7EX

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From our Chief Executive



Thanks to your tireless campaigning, stroke was firmly on the agenda when the UK Government launched its 10-Year Health Plan for England in July.

This is a moment of hope. The Plan promises to introduce a Cardiovascular Disease (CVD) Modern Service Framework that includes stroke by 2026. It's a roadmap for how services should be delivered, setting clear standards and expectations across prevention, treatment and rehabilitation. This is how the government plans to deliver its election pledge to cut cardiovascular and stroke deaths by 25% in the next decade. We've advocated for this for a long time, so we're pleased to see this commitment.

The Plan also pledges to prevent more strokes using digital tools

and tackling risk factors like smoking and poor diet. Crucially, a new service, Diagnosis Connect, will link patients directly to charities like ours for personalised support, recognising the vital role we play.

These successes are the result of teamwork across our organisation and community. Thanks to everyone who made stroke impossible to ignore.

We now need to make sure these promises become real improvements in stroke care by keeping up the pressure, working together, and making our voices heard. This applies to our wider campaigning – see our work in Scotland on page 16.

Let's make stroke a priority, together. Visit stroke.org.uk/campaigns to get involved.

Juliet Bouverie OBE

Stronger thanks to my 'village' of support

Nicola was happily balancing her career and family life in Ballygowan, when she had a stroke just before Christmas in 2022.

Nicola didn't receive any community support when she left hospital. Struggling physically and mentally with stroke's after-effects, including extreme fatigue, anxiety and brain fog, she felt lost.

'I was used to living a busy, but happy and productive life – working, training at the gym, doing school runs and activities with my boys,' recalls Nicola. 'Then all of a sudden, I struggled to leave the house.'

'The fatigue was tough. The smallest activity exhausted me – walking up and down the stairs, chatting with visitors. In the early days, the most I could cope with was an hour of conversation, then I would have to rest. It felt

like I existed in a bubble, with noises and people appearing very distant.'

Most devastatingly of all, the fatigue robbed Nicola of the energy to keep up with her young sons, Dylan, who was eight at the time, and Noah, who was five.

'It was really hard to be a mummy in the way I had been before my stroke. I was too tired to cope with the noise and activity levels of the boys and had to go to another room for peace and quiet.'

'Dylan understood that I couldn't do things as I wasn't well. But my youngest, Noah, asked me, 'Mummy, why don't you want to play with me?'. That broke my heart.'



Nicola with her sons, Noah and Dylan

'My husband, Darren, is an amazing support. He stepped into so many tasks that would have previously been mine. My boys had to get used to Mummy not being as involved in their lives anymore – that Daddy took them to and from school, did their homework and bedtimes and took them to parties. That Mummy needed to rest.

'It was a difficult time. I had so much doubt and insecurity. It was really scary not knowing what my future was going to be, and where I would be able to get back to.'

Wanting to talk to someone who understood what she was going through, Nicola signed up to our Weekly Volunteer Calls. 'The amazing lady who phoned me was a lifeline. It was wonderful to speak to another stroke survivor who was well into their recovery. Her lived experience, positivity and support made a huge difference.

'When you have kids, people always say it takes a village – you need a support squad around you to help. For me, it's the same thing after a stroke.

'My family and friends have been fantastic. We live beside my parents, which is great, as they could see me, and support Darren with the boys.'

'I'm so grateful for my village of support. Fellow stroke survivors helped me to know that I wasn't alone. It was lovely to have people who knew what it was like as I stepped out into the world again.

'My family and friends have been fantastic. We live beside my parents, which is great, as they could see me, and support Darren with the boys.

'Some friends have drifted away during my recovery, which was tough. But I've also gained some incredible friends who I feel safe enough to share with when I'm struggling.'

Nicola also received stroke-specific counselling from our



Nicola's parents, husband and sons support her ongoing recovery

Emotional Support Service in Northern Ireland too, to help her cope with anxiety.

'The Stroke Association counselling was fantastic as it gave me a place where I could be vulnerable, cry, have a rant and then put myself back together again. It helped me to process my sense of lost identity, and to accept where I am and that life is different.'

With this support, and a lot of determination, Nicola is making steady progress in her recovery. 'Managing constant fatigue is part of life now. Over time, I've been able to introduce normal tasks, such as doing the school runs and hoovering, but it was all very gradual and paced out, so I could rest in-between. It was a big deal when I was eventually able to both hoover and mop! It's funny the things that I celebrated, as each was a milestone.

If you have a question or need to talk, please contact us on **0303 3033 100**, helpline@stroke.org.uk or visit stroke.org.uk/support

Whatever you're facing, we're here to support you.



'I've been able to do things with the boys again too. I just need to build in rest around it. It's about finding a balance and different opportunities. For example, instead of playing football with them, we'll go to a lovely 'Mummy and Me' mindfulness class together.

'Yoga and mindfulness have been an important part of my recovery. I now appreciate the importance of having time to simply 'be' and to rest and recharge.

'Even though I had what's medically defined as a minor stroke, it had a major impact on my and my family's life. But, while I carry the effects of the stroke with me, it does not define me. It's now woven into my body and is part of me.

'It was life-changing and I know things could have been so different. I'm so grateful to still be here and for the opportunity to slow down and appreciate what really matters.'

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Understanding emotionalism

If you've found controlling your emotions harder since your stroke, you might be experiencing emotionalism. Although common, this can often be an upsetting or embarrassing side effect, especially if you weren't very emotional beforehand. However, there is support available.

Siân from our Stroke Support Helpline answers some frequently asked questions to help you understand and manage emotionalism:

Q What are the signs of emotionalism?

These depend on what's normal for you, but often include:

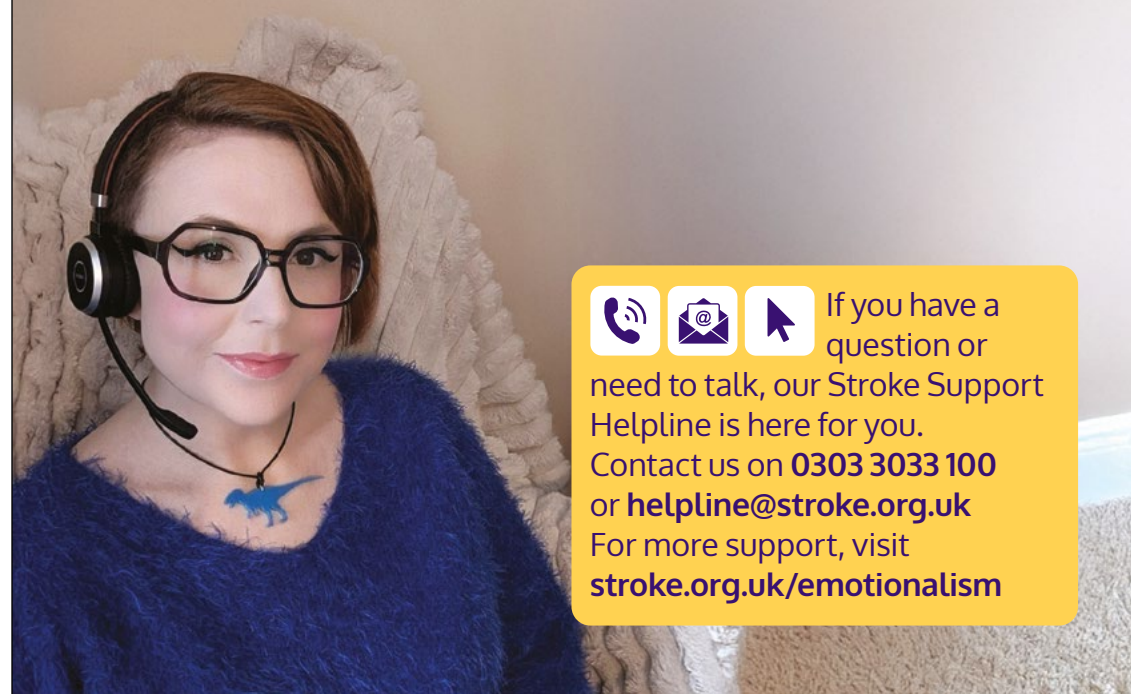
- Crying or laughing for no reason.
- Expressing your emotions more intensely than you actually feel them.
- Feeling like you have no control over your emotions – they come and go quickly or the smallest thing can set you off.
- Having emotions that seem out of place (such as laughing at something inappropriate or starting to swear, when you didn't before).

Q Are there treatments that can help?

When emotions are overwhelming, it's easy to think that things won't get better, but they do.

If you are struggling, let your stroke team or GP know. They can help you find support. For example, talking about how you feel can help you to understand and deal with it, so they may refer you to a psychologist or a counsellor. Medication might also help.

Emotional problems are often missed by doctors and it can be difficult to get them taken seriously. Trust yourself, and keep asking for help. If you're not getting the right support from your GP or stroke team, contact us on the Helpline.



If you have a question or need to talk, our Stroke Support Helpline is here for you. Contact us on **0303 3033 100** or **helpline@stroke.org.uk** For more support, visit **stroke.org.uk/emotionalism**

What can I do about it?



Give it time – Many people find that emotionalism improves or disappears altogether within the first six months. If it lasts longer than this, speak to your GP.



Be open – Tell people about your emotionalism and how you want them to respond. This can help reduce embarrassment if you do become emotional, as those you're with will know why and how to support you. (For example, give you a hug, or just ignore it.) Talking to other stroke survivors who understand can help as well.

Call us or visit **stroke.org.uk/support** for more information.



Tell people when it's real – Tell people when you're genuinely upset, so that they don't mistake it for emotionalism. Don't be afraid to ask for comfort and support.



Distract yourself – If you feel your emotions rising, try changing your environment and activity. Go into another room, change the conversation or the TV channel. Keeping active and being outside can also improve your mood – even just sitting in the fresh air can help.

Help make stroke a priority with incoming MSPs

The Scottish Parliament election in May 2026 is a crucial opportunity to make stroke treatment and care a priority in Scotland. But we need your help to do it!

Stroke teams across Scotland do an incredible job with the resources they have. But too many people still miss out on the treatment, care and support they need because of political decisions that shape where money is spent, staffing and how services are run.

Stroke care needs to be a bigger priority in the plans and budgets that shape Scotland's health and social care systems.

The Members of the Scottish Parliament (MSPs) who are elected in May will have the power to drive important improvements to stroke care.

They just need to know that voters expect it.

This is where you come in. We're looking for passionate volunteers to become Constituency Advocates – local champions for stroke in their communities.

Over the coming months, candidates will be out and about, seeking support in their constituencies. Politicians are more likely to listen to their constituency voters than anyone else. With an average of 2,000 stroke survivors in every Scottish constituency, stroke should be high on their agenda.



We need your help to get candidates from all political parties to commit to prioritising stroke if they're elected. One of the ways you can do this is to simply ask your local candidate to take a photo with our 'Let's make stroke a priority' poster. This will help us build

a permanent online record of political support.

We'll provide all the contact details, guidance and resources you need – but it's your personal connection to stroke and local knowledge that will make an impact.



Want to become a Constituency Advocate?

Send your name and postcode to Sarah, our Campaigns Assistant at sarah.broadhurst@stroke.org.uk. Sarah can support you with anything you need – information, connections in your area or just a friendly chat if you're unsure where to start.

'Speak from experience'

Engaging with candidates is a powerful way to create change. Kelly, 74, a volunteer from Alloa, near Stirling, is already getting the attention of his local politicians.

Although not a stroke survivor himself, Kelly is passionate about improving stroke rehabilitation.

'I've met lots of stroke survivors over the years and I'm always struck by their struggles,' says Kelly. 'I want to show politicians that stroke survivors, their loved ones and carers deserve better, and I'm determined to get out there and give it a go!'

Kelly has found the politicians he's met so far consistently keen to meet constituents.

Recently, he invited Keith Brown, MSP for Clackmannanshire and Dunblane, to visit a stall set up by the Clackmannanshire Stroke Support Group in Alloa



Library. He also arranged for Alexander Stewart, MSP for Mid Scotland and Fife, to meet group members in spring.

Kelly's advice for engaging with politicians is simple:

- ✓ Learn about stroke in your area to give you the confidence to say your piece.
- ✓ Speak from experience – have you had a stroke or know someone who has? Share your experiences.
- ✓ Keep it neutral – focus on people and avoid political point scoring.



Find out more about stroke in your area – including your health board's performance – at stroke.org.uk/scotland/facts

'I'm enjoying speaking to candidates and helping them to understand more about the realities of stroke in Scotland and the need for change,' says Kelly. 'The more support we can get now, the bigger difference we can make in the future.'



Ongoing support is essential to recovery

Recovery after stroke can take years of challenging, repetitive therapy, affecting every aspect of life for you and those closest to you. Yet, public understanding about the need for long-term rehabilitation and support remains low.

That's why sharing stories, like Chris's, matters.

Chris was 23 when he had a stroke due to a rare childhood disease. He made a good physical recovery and returned to many things he loved, like supporting Portsmouth FC, but struggled with his mental health.

'I was a typical lad in my twenties who just wanted a normal life,' says Chris. 'But I felt very lonely after the stroke because I couldn't relate to anyone. I've had anxiety since childhood, and it got worse because I didn't really process the stroke or get emotional support.'

In 2023, after stress and anxiety disrupted his ability to take his medication, Chris had a second, more severe stroke. It left him with significant physical and cognitive challenges, preventing him from living independently, working or driving.

'My left foot dragged when I walked, my voice was quiet, and my speech was slow. It was frustrating to constantly repeat myself. My brothers took me to watch Pompey to lift my mood. But my brain couldn't keep up with the game.'

Chris spent time in a rehabilitation centre, then was discharged to live with his parents. At first, they didn't realise the extent of his cognitive problems, making the transition tough. 'It was difficult as he came across as obstinate and lethargic,' says his mum, Jackie. 'But now we know that this was caused by the stroke, and he needs support to progress.'



Chris (centre) with his brothers at a Portsmouth FC game

Community services were vital in Chris's recovery. He received physiotherapy with the Community Stroke Rehab Team, who referred him to the Neurogym. Over time, they helped him to walk properly again.

Chris was also supported by his local Stroke Support Coordinator from the Stroke Association, Debby. 'She helped me to claim financial benefits and referred me for Weekly Volunteer Calls,'

he says. 'It was brilliant talking to another stroke survivor my age who understood.'

Chris's parents continue to help him with everyday activities. Despite ongoing challenges, Chris feels hopeful. 'I'm doing things I enjoy again, like watching Pompey with my brothers. When I realised I could follow the game, it felt like a real accomplishment. I'd love to help others who've had a stroke too.'

Share your story

If you or someone close to you would like to share your stroke recovery story, visit stroke.org.uk/share-your-story We'd love to hear from you.

Carers: Looking after your wellbeing

At the young age of 24, Hannah suddenly took on a caring role for her dad when he had a stroke in October 2023.

Before his stroke, Hannah's dad, Colin, had always been the person she turned to for help and support. Now, it's the other way around.

'My life has changed drastically,' says Hannah. 'The roles between me and my dad have almost reversed and sometimes I feel like the parent.'

Alongside her mum, Hannah cares for Colin every day. This can involve dealing with his finances, making meals and administering medication. On top of this, Hannah works as a medical secretary, so she knows only too well how challenging balancing these responsibilities can be.

Now 26, Hannah wants to share her strategies to help other unpaid carers look after themselves.

Hannah's top wellbeing tips:

✓ **'Take time out to do things you enjoy – and don't feel guilty about it.'** There are days when you put on a brave face, but inside you're running on empty. It gets to a point where it's overwhelming and you need to take a step back. You sometimes have to be selfish to look after yourself. If something were to happen to you and you've got poor health, who's going to look after your loved one then? Taking time for yourself is really important for your health.'



Services like respite care can allow you to have a break. Go to **stroke.org.uk/respite** to find out how respite care works.

Hannah and her dad, Colin



'Everything takes time with stroke, but everything progresses over time as well, and things do improve.'



'Talk to someone.'

When I feel I need to take time out, I talk to a friend or my siblings. I express the way I'm feeling and get it off my chest. Mum and Dad go to a weekly Bowls Stroke Club through the Stroke Association. That's helped Dad and Mum massively because another stroke survivor of a similar age and his wife go. My mum gets to talk to her, and they just have a shared understanding. At the Stroke Association, there is always someone who will listen.'



You can connect with other unpaid stroke carers, virtually or in person, through our Online Community (page 28), local stroke support groups (page 40), or weekly conversations with one of our trained volunteers. Visit stroke.org.uk/support to find out more.



'Ask for help. It's okay to admit it's hard. You don't have to do everything yourself. My mum doesn't like to ask for help or tell you that she's struggling. But it's important that you do ask for the help to look after yourself as well as a stroke survivor. Drop the barrier and let people in.'

Visit stroke.org.uk/caring for support.



'Take positives from what's happened. You've got to have a positive attitude, otherwise I don't think you'd get through it. Everything takes time with stroke, but everything progresses over time as well, and things do improve. Even on the worst days, remember you're making a difference. You're giving someone the chance to live with dignity – that's really rewarding. Dad and I were close before, but we are even closer now. We still have each other, and that's what matters.'

Colin enjoys going to the Bowls Stroke Club as part of his recovery



Finding strength in community and challenge

In January 2021, Donald woke up in hospital with no memory of what had happened.

A bachelor living in Portsmouth, Donald valued his independence. Suddenly, he was paralysed on his right and struggling to swallow and speak after a stroke.

Discharged during the pandemic, Donald was placed in a bedsit with carers, but the conditions were appalling. 'It was horrendous,' says Donald. 'My carers physically abused me. I didn't have a proper shower for a year and couldn't leave the flat. My social worker didn't help. I was so alone.'

Realising the situation, Donald's sister, Irene, brought him to live with her in Oxfordshire, where he finally received proper support. 'He's had physio and Botox to help with his paralysis,' says Irene. 'You can see how

hard Donald tries. Here, they never gave up on him.'

Keen to further his recovery, Donald and Irene did our '31 Minutes of Exercise a Day' fundraising challenge in May 2025.

'We went to the gym every day,' says Irene. 'We set a time, stuck to it, and it became quite a thing. It gave us purpose.'

'Once I say I'm going to do something, I will,' says Donald. 'The challenge gave me a reason to get up and go. I'd sing 'Don't Stop Thinking About Tomorrow,' while exercising to stay motivated.'

Physically, the difference was striking. 'My stroke leg used to be stone cold, but with exercise, it warmed up. I could walk a bit more with my frame.'

Donald shared his journey on our Facebook challenge group, where support poured in. 'I loved seeing what people were saying about me. Their encouragement kept

me going. People even started sponsoring me. Every donation made me feel proud to support a cause close to my heart.

'It felt great to know I was helping other survivors. It wasn't just about the challenge – it was being part of something bigger.'

'We saw such a difference in Donald,' adds Irene. 'The group was genuine, supportive and friendly. People weren't alone. We made lasting friendships.'

'Fundraising challenges like this keep you active, motivated, and connected. Everyone can do something – you'd be surprised at how much you can adapt around your disability. As a carer, it was good for me too.'

Donald now encourages others to get involved. 'Find something to motivate you every day, however small, and stick at it. You'll be surprised at what you can achieve.'



This January, start your year with a new challenge. From runs to bake sales, skydives to quizzes, you can make a difference for people affected by stroke. Get involved at events.stroke.org.uk

'Talking to people who understand stroke means the world to me'

'Having a stroke is like someone whipping the rug out from under your feet,' says stroke survivor, Rebecca. She was 41 when, in January 2024, she had a bleed in her brain.

Rebecca's stroke caused significant physical weakness, seizures and affected her vision. Despite this, she was discharged home from hospital with limited community support.

'I went from doing parkrun every Saturday to needing help getting in and out of the shower,' she says. 'It's crazy how quickly your independence and confidence is taken from you.'

'The first 12 weeks were dark. After having a stroke, you don't fully understand what has happened to you or what will happen next. I had post-traumatic stress disorder and kept having flashbacks to having seizures in hospital.'

'My speech was stuttered and I couldn't remember words. My brain felt broken. I had no coping mechanisms and didn't have the confidence or vocabulary to speak to anyone about it. I was lost.'

Needing help, Rebecca was referred to an NHS neuropsychology service, which was a 'game-changer' for her recovery.



'Neuropsychology was brilliant. When I had flashbacks, the therapist told me to use a simple grounding technique to prove to myself that I wasn't having another seizure or stroke. For example, I'm not in hospital because I can feel the carpet beneath my feet. I'm okay because I can move my toes.'

'After having a stroke, you don't fully understand what has happened to you or what will happen next.'

'It helped me realise that my brain wasn't broken, it had just been rearranged. The information was still there, I just had to find a different route to it.'



As her mood and vision gradually improved, Rebecca started researching stroke and found our Online Community – a vibrant online support network where anyone affected by stroke can connect with others with shared experiences.

‘I realised there were other stroke survivors out there, surviving and thriving,’ says Rebecca. ‘Seeing other people post their achievements on the forum gave me inspiration to try hard so that I could post mine on there and inspire other people too.’

‘Talking to people who understand stroke means the world to me. I can be honest about having a bad day with my balance or fatigue because they will get it. Finding out you’re not the only person with questions or concerns is such a relief.’

‘I realised there were other stroke survivors out there, surviving and thriving.’

Rebecca is grateful for the long-term friends she has made through the Online Community who’ve supported her recovery. She now tries to help others.

‘I want to offer people support. I validate their fears but also reassure them that they don’t have to stay in that dark place and life can get better.’

‘The Online Community is an amazing resource. I’d advise anyone to read through other people’s posts to hear about their experiences. There are so many stroke survivors and carers willing to welcome and help you. It could have a massively positive impact on your life, like it has for me.’



You don’t need to face stroke alone.

However long you’ve been living with stroke, our Online Community is here to support you day and night. Visit onlinecommunity.stroke.org.uk to join.

Understanding small vessel disease

Cerebral small vessel disease (SVD) damages tiny blood vessels in the brain, limiting blood supply to nearby areas of the brain. Having cerebral SVD increases your risk of both stroke and vascular dementia.

Although we can see the damaged brain tissue on scans, currently there are no treatments that can reverse, stop or even slow down cerebral SVD. This is partly because we don't understand exactly how SVD causes brain damage.

One possibility is that cerebral SVD might make it harder for blood vessels to open as much. This could be causing uneven blood flow, or stopping the brain from getting rid of waste as effectively.

Research Fellow, Michael Stringer from the University of Edinburgh, is investigating

brain scans to understand how brain damage changes over time in stroke survivors with cerebral SVD. He's also exploring the role our body's waste clearance system plays in this disease.

'Like many people, my family has been affected by stroke and the long-term vascular damage that causes dementia,' says Michael. 'Currently, we don't know why some stroke survivors go on to have more strokes and others don't – even when they are on the best treatments. I want to find out why the brains of some stroke survivors become more damaged than others.'

To do this, Michael and his team are analysing brain scans taken soon after stroke, then 6 and 12 months later, in people whose strokes were caused by SVD.

'Brain images produce a huge amount of information', explains Michael. 'Using special types of brain scan, which tell us about how well stroke survivors' brains are working, we can assess how responsive their blood vessels are. We can also look at whether the protective layer between blood vessels and brain tissue is leaky or not.'

Michael also thinks that the brain's waste clearance mechanism might not be working as effectively in people with SVD. As part of this project, he's asking some of the stroke survivor participants to come in for an additional three-year follow-up to see whether this is the case.

'We are asking participants to come for another brain scan at three years to measure how waste drains from the brain and how it changes over time.'





Michael at our Researchers' Day networking event last autumn

'I want to assess whether the brain's waste clearance works less well in patients with more visible brain differences on their scans.

'I hope this research will help us to find out if there are differences in how well the blood vessels are working, so we can better understand the causes of stroke, develop new treatments, and hopefully prevent strokes in the future.

'This is one of the first research projects to assess the brain

waste clearance system in stroke non-invasively. If the brain's waste clearance system is affected in SVD, this may be an important new factor to consider in selecting treatments and developing new drugs.

'It's a privilege to be able to work with stroke survivors, their families and other researchers to improve our understanding of what causes stroke. I'll continue working with them to make sure the project is guided by their lived experience.'



Visit stroke.org.uk/Stringer to learn more about Michael's vital research. If you're interested in getting involved in research go to stroke.org.uk/involved-research to find out more.

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.

I enclose my total gift of £

Funds raised will go towards vital services and pioneering research to help support people affected by stroke.

I enclose a cheque made payable to the 'Stroke Association' OR please debit my: ☐ MasterCard ☐ Visa ☐ CAF Charity Card

Card no: - - -

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Date: / /

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giftaid it

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Return your form

Please detach this form and return it to us using the envelope enclosed, or post it to:
Stroke Association, Bumpers Way, Bumpers Farm, Chippenham SN14 6NG



Keeping in touch

We would love to send you information about the difference you can make to families affected by stroke through campaigning, volunteering, donating and through your own fundraising. Please tell us how you'd like us to stay in touch by filling in your details below.

How would you like to hear from us?

☐ Email ☐ Text ☐ Phone

SNDON
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Your name:

Please enter your phone number or email:

Address

Postcode

Our Promise

Your privacy is our priority. We promise to keep your details safe and will never sell them. We will also keep in touch by post about how we can continue to support you, and opportunities to support us. If you would like to change the way you hear from us, just call **0300 3300 740** or email supporter.relations@stroke.org.uk. How we protect and use your personal data is set out in our privacy policy at stroke.org.uk/privacy

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Stroke
Association



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Raising awareness of atrial fibrillation

When Keith, 74, had a stroke in June 2024, he had no idea that an undiagnosed heart condition – atrial fibrillation (AF) – was to blame.

He and his wife, Angela, were at home when she spotted him behaving strangely. 'My arm was going up in the air, swinging, coming down and doing all sorts of things,' Keith recalls. 'Angela took one look at me and said, 'Darling, I think you've had a stroke'.'

Keith was rushed to hospital, where he received urgent clot-busting drugs. But it wasn't until he saw his GP two weeks later that he discovered the cause of the stroke. 'I had various tests including an ECG (electrocardiogram) in the surgery, which showed I was in AF.'

Atrial fibrillation is a type of irregular heartbeat that affects

around 1.4 million people in the UK. It increases the risk of blood clots forming in the heart, which can lead to a stroke. AF often has no symptoms and is sometimes only discovered during routine checks – or, as in Keith's case, after a stroke has already happened.

'I didn't even know what AF was, let alone that it could cause strokes. In the 18 months before my stroke, I'd been having heart palpitations. It's a strange feeling in your chest, as if your heart's missed a beat.

'I had tests, 24-hour ECGs, but they came back clear. I should have had an ECG over at least seven days, not just 24 hours, as this might have picked up AF. It's easy to miss.'

After his diagnosis, Keith underwent an urgent procedure to help restore a normal heart rhythm and reduce the risk of further strokes.

'If anyone is having palpitations, I would tell them to go to their GP. People need to be aware that it's a silent problem you shouldn't ignore.'

'The stroke stopped me in my tracks,' says Keith, who struggles with fatigue, anxiety and emotional difficulties. 'At first, I was reluctant to do things as I was conscious of overdoing it. But Angela, my children and grandchildren are good at encouraging me, and I try to do as much as I can.'

AF can run in families, and Keith's son has since been diagnosed with it too. 'It isn't just the elderly – it can affect anybody, including younger people,' says Keith.



For Stroke Prevention Day on 29 January 2026, we're working with OMRON Healthcare UK to raise awareness of AF as a major stroke risk factor. Simple heart-rhythm checks, manually (visit stroke.org.uk/check-heartrate to learn how) or with a trusted monitor, can help you spot early symptoms. Find out more about Stroke Prevention Day at stroke.org.uk/SPD or call **0300 3300 740**.

Eyes down, spirits up

Recovering from stroke can be lonely. But stroke support groups, like the Medway Stroke Club offer supportive spaces to meet others who understand, try new things and rebuild your confidence.

Stroke survivor, Tony, and his wife, Norma, have attended the Medway Stroke Club for four years. 'It is a friendly and welcoming place with a huge variety of activities,' says Norma. 'We've met new people and

tried things that we would never have done otherwise.'

Fellow member, Marjorie, agrees. 'I enjoy the laughter and camaraderie. We share experiences and help each other. I've made lots of new friends, which I feel lucky to have.

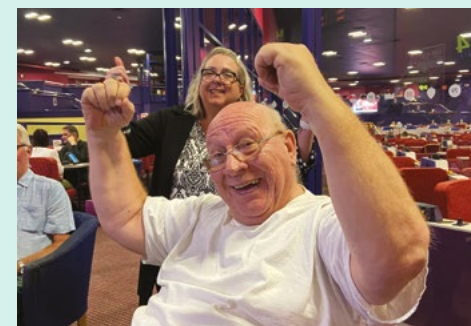
'The outings and activities are all adapted to people's abilities and needs, helping to give them their confidence back.'



Recently, the club visited their local Buzz Bingo in Rochester as part of our partnership with them. Buzz Bingo staff gave them a warm welcome, providing refreshments, goodie bags and guidance for first-time players.

'It was a great experience,' says Norma. 'Everyone was so helpful, and the technology was easy to understand and adapt so everyone could keep up.

'They helped us during the games and made sure that no one missed out on a claim. We all turned out to be very good at this bit, with a few of us winning cash prizes! We enjoyed it so much that some of us have been back since.'



Visit stroke.org.uk/groups to see what's in your local area and online.

Medway Stroke Club regulars, Mick and Jen, also found the trip memorable. 'It's not somewhere we'd have gone on our own, but we had a good day,' says Mick. 'I had the biggest win – £100! With the money, I treated the ladies I take to the stroke club to lunch.

'We've attended the stroke group nearly every week since my wife Jen's stroke 12 years ago. They're a friendly bunch and we do lots of interesting things. Their support means a lot to us.'

As our partnership comes to an end, we want to say a big thank you to Buzz Bingo. Over the past three years, they've raised over £250,000, and helped to tackle social isolation by supporting people affected by stroke to join bingo clubs and meet others in their communities.

Getting help with water bills after a stroke

After a stroke, you might find that you need to use more water than before for self-care or for cleaning specialist equipment, which can increase household costs.

If you're struggling with the rising cost of water bills, there's lots of help available around the UK.

i Remember – Water companies in the UK can't legally cut off or restrict your water supply if you don't pay. However, they can take legal action, so it's best to contact them quickly if you're having difficulties paying so they can help.

England and Wales

- **WaterSure Scheme** – If you use a lot of water because you have a medical condition, are on certain benefits and have a water meter, you could be eligible for the WaterSure Scheme. This caps your water bill at the average household bill for your water company's area.

You can apply by filling out a form from your water company, providing evidence of your medical condition, and your benefits.

- **Social tariffs** – If you have no or a low-income, you might be eligible for a discount on your water bills. All water companies offer these social tariffs, but the schemes can differ on who's eligible and what assistance they provide.

Visit citizensadvice.org.uk/consumer/water for more advice about reducing your water costs.

Scotland

- **If you're on the public water supply** – Water and sewerage are included in your council tax. If you get a Council Tax Reduction (CTR), you'll automatically get a discount on water charges. This reduction depends on how much CTR you get. Your local council should

automatically apply this to your bill. Check with them to find out if you're eligible and how to apply.

- **If you have a water meter** – You need to contact Scottish Water directly about your bills (scottishwater.co.uk).

Speak to your council, check Scottish Water guidance or visit citizensadvice.org.uk/scotland/consumer/water for help.

Northern Ireland

- **Customer Care Register** – If you're an older person, have a serious medical condition or disability, or need extra help for any reason, you can join the Customer Care Register to get extra free services.

Sign up at niwater.com/education-and-the-community/community/customer-care-register#ccr-form

Top tips:

1. Contact your provider early

Explain your situation and ask about medical or financial support schemes.

2. Check benefit eligibility

Many schemes require you to be on certain benefits – make sure you're claiming what you're entitled to.

3. Join the Priority Services Register (PSR)

Electricity, gas and water companies offer a PSR for customers with health conditions so you can get extra support if there's a supply interruption. Visit theapsr.co.uk to sign up.



For more benefits and financial help, visit stroke.org.uk/financial-assistance, or call our Stroke Support Helpline on 0303 3033 100.



Puzzles



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

Word search

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

DEER	BADGER
SQUIRREL	WREN
OWL	FOX
HEDGEHOG	WEASEL
RABBIT	VOLE

Across

- 4 Funny (5)
7 Group of small boats (8)
8 Spot (3)
9 Dizzy (11)
12 Type of curry (8)
13 Curry side dish (4)
15 Entreaty (4)
16 Snake (8)
17 Ostentation (11)
19 White wine and cassis (3)
20 Protection (8)
21 Bring to bear (5)

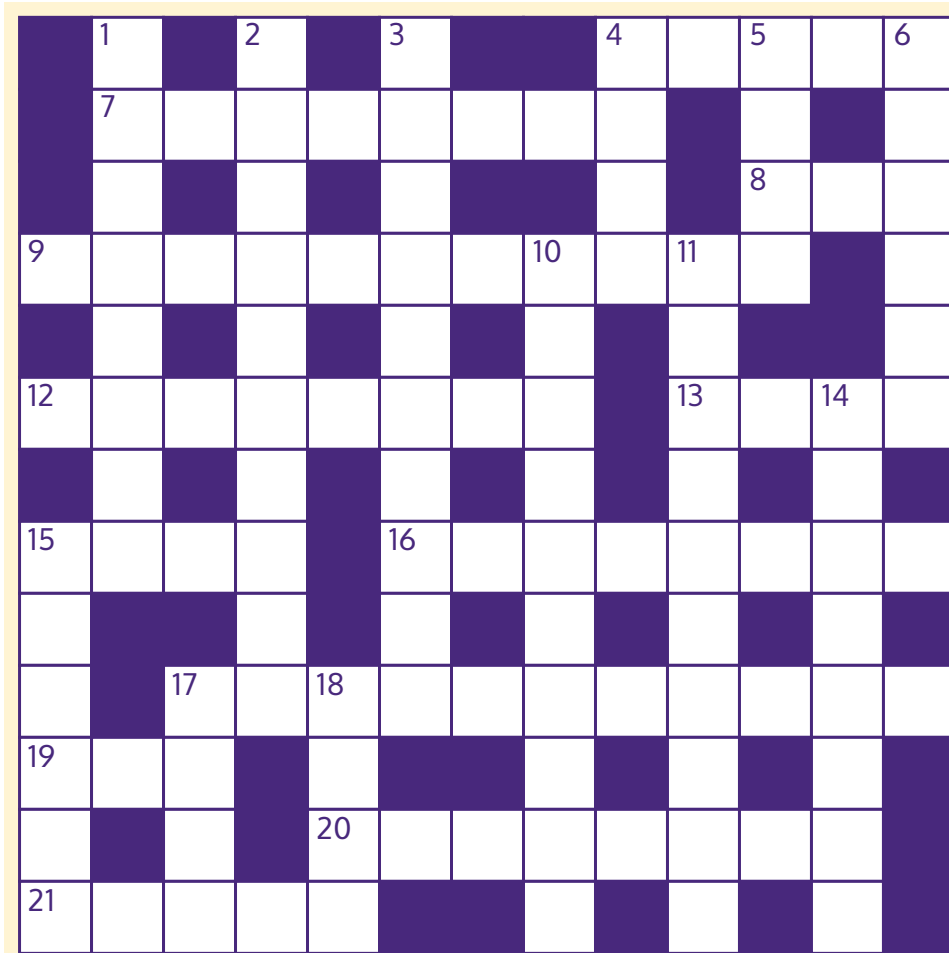
Lottery

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 In spite of everything (5,3)
2 Place briefly visited (4,2,4)
3 Leeway (6,4)
4 Movable bridge (4)
5 Church service (4)
6 Bill of exchange (6)
10 Australian soap (10)
11 Like a wild horse? (10)
14 It's made by burners for use in burners (8)
15 Little finger (6)
17 Liberate (4)
18 Border (4)

Solutions
see page 50



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



Seasonal Change Marks Innovative Specialist Nutrition Launches

It's safe to say the Wiltshire Farm Foods development team has been busy this year. The award-winning ready meal provider has introduced five new dishes to its specialist nutrition range, including a Purée Pastry Topped Steak Pie and a Minced Hunter's Chicken.

The new dishes have been created to give those on a Level 4 and Level 5 diet more variety and flavour than ever before. Thanks to the team of chefs and in-house dietitians you can also rest assured that not only do these dishes taste fantastic, they are also packed with essential vitamins and minerals so there's no compromise on nutritional intake.

You can choose from Level 4 Purée Sausage Roll as a light snack alternative during the day; a Level 4 Purée Pastry Topped Steak Pie featuring

puréed steak beneath a buttery pastry top, served with mashed potatoes and peas; or a Level 4 Purée Cheese Omelette served with deliciously browned chips and beans.

Wiltshire Farm Foods Development Chef, Jethro Lawrence, has been developing these particular dishes with the team over the last 18 months or so:

"The peas in our Level 4 Purée Pastry Topped Steak Pie look especially vibrant in colour and are no different to freshly cooked peas, other than their moulding and texture. Our pastry is particularly innovative which tops the steak, and creates a distinct layer, similar to the real thing.

"We can't wait for our customers to try these new flavours."

WILTSHIRE
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FOODS

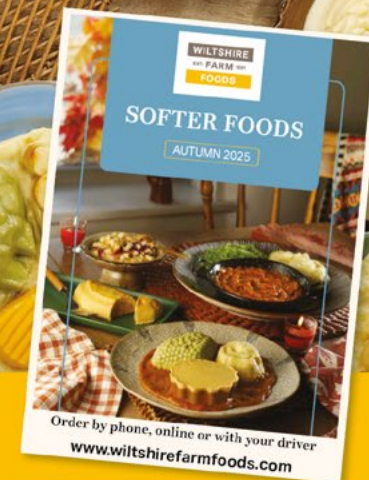
View the new Specialist Nutrition range from
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Finding strength through support

When a stroke happens, we're here to provide vital support for stroke survivors and their families. But we can only do this 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.

Tim and Michael

Well done to stroke survivor, Tim, and his friend, Michael, who celebrated Tim's ongoing recovery by cycling the 500-mile Northern Scotland cycle circuit in August 2025. Together they've raised an incredible £4,740.



Hayley

Thank you to Hayley, whose triathlon challenge raised nearly £6,000! She was inspired by her nephew, Tom, and the support he received after his stroke aged 31. 'I've witnessed first-hand the challenges and courage recovery takes,' says Hayley. 'I'm raising funds to help others on their journey.'



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

How does your donation help?



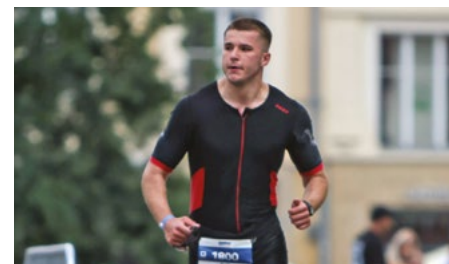
£10 supports our Stroke Support Helpline to answer a call from someone who urgently needs support after a life-changing stroke.



£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.



Scott

Congratulations to Scott, who took on a punishing Iron Man challenge in Poland. He raised nearly £4,000 for stroke survivors, like his grandpa. 'My Grandpa had less than 30% chance of survival but has managed to make a recovery,' says Scott. 'This is a cause close to my family's heart.'



Volunteer spotlight

Julie has been volunteering with us for nearly three years, delivering talks to raise awareness about stroke in her community and beyond.

'I enjoy speaking to the public and empowering them with knowledge about how to recognise a stroke and reduce their risk of the condition. By the end of 2025, I'll have carried out over 100 stroke talks!'

'There's a lack of awareness about stroke and when to seek help. There are many people who never check their blood pressure or pulse.'

'This drives me to keep getting the message out there so we can stop more people dying from stroke and prevent severe disability.'

Visit stroke.org.uk/yoursupport 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:



Ultra Challenge Series Throughout 2026

With 20 events around the UK, where you can walk, jog or run distances from 10k family events, to 100k trails, Ultra Challenge has something for everyone: stroke.org.uk/ultra-challenge26

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

Crossword solution

Across: 4 Comic, 7 Flotilla, 8 See, 9 Vertiginous, 12 Jalfrezi, 13 Rice, 15 Plea, 16 Ophidian, 17 Flamboyance, 19 Kir, 20 Umbrella, 21 Exert

Down: 1 After all, 2 Port of call, 3 Wiggle room, 4 Capo, 5 Mass, 6 Cheque, 10 Neighbours, 11 Unrideable, 14 Charcoal, 15 Pinkie, 17 Free, 18 Abut



Skydiving

Experience the thrill of a lifetime by taking part in a sponsored tandem skydive. Sign up at stroke.org.uk/skydive to take an unforgettable leap (from 10,000 feet!) to help support stroke survivors around the UK.

Looking for other ways to get involved?

Cheer on our participants at events across the UK, including the Bath Half Marathon and Brighton Marathon. Your support makes all the difference. Visit stroke.org.uk/JoinUs to sign up.

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Looking to become more independent and confident by reducing falls and trips and making walking less of an effort while living with the effects of a stroke?

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*OML FES user survey 2024



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