



Cognition refers to how a person thinks and understands. Cognition includes attention, orientation, memory, insight, impulse control, planning, problem-solving and decision-making. Cognitive changes can occur due to damage to the brain after a stroke. Mood, anxiety, fatigue, sleep, pain and medications are common factors that can also affect cognition after a stroke. As many as two-thirds of persons with stroke experience cognitive changes.

What you should know

- ✓ Changes to cognition are less visible than physical changes but can be just as or more significant
- ✓ Individual impacts of cognitive changes vary from person to person
- ✓ Cognitive changes can affect safety and quality of life. People with cognitive changes may:
 - have difficulty remembering recent or past event (e.g. not remembering to call for assistance before getting up)
 - not always be aware of who they are, where they are and/or the date and time
 - be easily distracted (e.g. wandering off topic or task in conversation or requiring repetition of instructions)
 - need more time to think things through and respond
 - have difficulty recognizing their limitations and abilities
 - act quickly without thinking (i.e. impulsive)

The above changes can cause distress to individuals with stroke, impacting mood, causing frustration and affecting daily activities

- ✓ Persons with cognitive changes function better with a structured routine that includes tasks that are meaningful to them

Smart Tips - Always follow the care plan!

Your Approach as a Health Care Provider



- Be patient
- Speak slowly and clearly. Use communication tools as needed. (See Smart Tips for Stroke Care – Communication After Stroke: Aphasia)
- Provide extra time to allow the person to understand and respond
- Make eye contact to help the person remain engaged in the task
- Collaborate with the person to establish a consistent routine
- Confirm that the person understands what you are asking of them
- Include the family in care

Provide Guidance for Task Completion



- Give short and simple instructions, one instruction at a time
- Encourage or help the person to start the task
- Break down the task into parts and focus on one activity at a time
- Encourage the person to slow down
- Repeat information and redirect as needed

Be Aware of the Person's Abilities



- Get to know the person. Remember that they may not understand and appreciate their own abilities and limitations
- Provide gentle reminders to the person of their current abilities since the stroke
- Make sure the person is ready to participate (e.g. toileting completed, pain controlled, glasses and hearing aids in place)
- Supervise as necessary

Environment



- Minimize noise and distractions (e.g. TV and radio)
- Encourage the use of aids (e.g. calendars, journal, white board, daily plan)
- Post reminders to promote safety (e.g. call for help, use your walker)
- Help make the environment as safe as possible (e.g. call bell in place, mobility device nearby)
- Help personalize their room (e.g. photos, familiar items)
- Use labels and signs to help organize and locate items (e.g. picture of socks on drawer)

Seek extra support

- ✓ Cognition should be monitored after stroke to understand the person's abilities and develop a personalized care plan. You are the eyes and ears for the team
- ✓ If you notice a sudden change in cognition, report it to your team immediately
- ✓ Occupational Therapists are experts in cognition. It may be helpful to involve them in the person's care