



How Should I Communicate as a Caregiver?

As a caregiver, you have to communicate with many people: your loved one, family, friends, co-workers, healthcare providers and insurance companies. Effective communication is key to your success.

Your time and patience may be stretched thin. So, it's important to stay organized. Separate your emotions from your conversations and keep on the subject for each person you talk to. Below are some simple tips to help you stay focused and get the best results.



Communication Tips

Talking to your family:

- Talk openly about your fears, worries and needs.
- Remember that everyone is feeling the pressure and insecurity of the event and try to be patient. Give everyone time to adjust in his or her own way.

Talking to your loved one:

- Give both of you time to accept what has happened. Realize that your roles may have changed.
- Be firm, honest, patient and kind.
- Use “I” messages rather than “you” messages. Saying “I feel angry” rather than “You made me angry” allows you to express your feelings without blaming others or causing them to be defensive.
- If your loved one has aphasia after a stroke, find support to help learn the best way to communicate.

Talking to healthcare providers:

You can improve the care your loved one receives by talking about your concerns, asking questions and getting the facts. Simple communication skills can help you get what you need from your doctor — over the phone, at the hospital, or during office visits.

- When you talk to your healthcare providers, clarify what you hear to be sure that you understand the information or instructions.
- Write down your questions before doctor’s visits to make sure you get all your topics covered.
- Keep records of all that occurs with your loved one. It will help the doctor give better treatment.
- Separate anger and frustration about not being able to help your loved one from your feelings about the doctor. Remember, you are both on the same side.

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If your loved one had a heart attack:

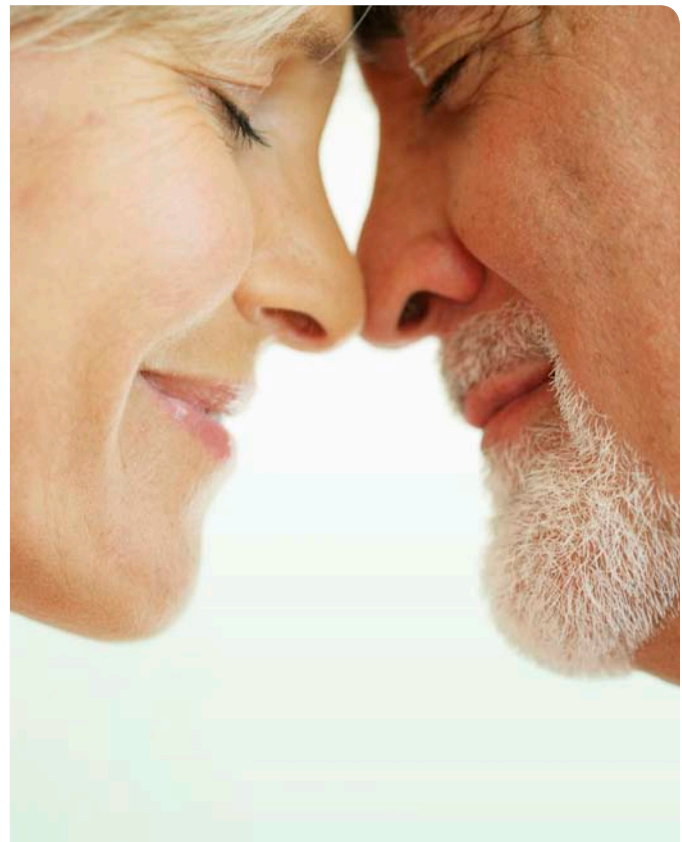
A heart attack frightens everyone. Your loved one will need time to adjust and may be very emotional at times. You both need to communicate your real feelings to each other. You'll also need to help your loved one follow the doctor's recommendations for the best possible recovery.

If your loved one had a stroke:

Stroke recovery can be difficult. Stroke can have a big impact on your loved one's ability to communicate, especially he or she has aphasia. People with expressive aphasia know what they want to say but have trouble saying it. Those with receptive aphasia have trouble understanding words other people speak.

If your loved one is having language challenges, a speech therapist may be part of their healthcare team. Talk with the therapist to better understand your loved one's condition. Ask for tips to make communication easier.

Be willing to accept ANY form of communication as equally valid: gestures, writing, drawing, using a notebook, intonation or speech.



HOW CAN I LEARN MORE?

- 1 Call **1-800-AHA-USA1** (1-800-242-8721), or visit **heart.org** to learn more about heart disease and stroke.
- 2 Sign up to get *Heart Insight*, a free magazine for heart patients and their families, at **heartinsight.org**.
- 3 Connect with others sharing similar journeys with heart disease and stroke by joining our Support Network at **heart.org/supportnetwork**.

Do you have questions for the doctor or nurse?

Take a few minutes to write your questions for the next time you see your healthcare provider.

For example:

What can I do to help my loved one get back to as normal a life as possible?

My Questions:

We have many other fact sheets to help you make healthier choices to reduce your risk, manage disease or care for a loved one. Visit **heart.org/answersbyheart** to learn more.