



Suggestions for Survivors

by John Schlosser, Survivor
Stanwood, Washington

I use a “helping hand” — a metal rod with a grasping device at the end. It’s like an extension of your arm. It is great for getting a book off a high shelf or picking up something from the floor.

I have a motorized wheelchair called a “Jazzy.” Medicare paid for it; my only cost was a lot of paper work. It has two drive wheels centrally placed that have separate motors, so they can turn in opposite directions and make the chair turn around in close quarters. I use my Jazzy mostly for outdoor trips.

I have three grab bars in the bathroom and use them daily.

Getting Dressed

When I wake up in the morning I throw back the covers and reach for my “sky hook.” A sky hook is a metal ring suspended over the bed of an orthopedic or paralyzed patient. I was given a hospital bed with a sky hook, and it is a great help for turning over or getting out of bed. Another important thing is to wear slippery-fabric pajamas. These make it easy to change position in bed.

I start my dressing with my socks — not an easy task with only one hand — but it can be done. It’s easier if the socks are not too tight.

After socks come underpants. In my case, due to incontinence, this means a pad of Depends with straps. Occasionally I make the mistake of putting on my trousers before I have put on my long johns! That’s frustrating but not serious. But when I did it twice on the same winter morning I began to think that my stroke did affect my mind!

Buttoning a shirt is the hardest part of dressing. Letting my left thumbnail grow long is a great help for finding the button hole and guiding the button through. To avoid getting the buttons in the wrong holes I begin with the bottom button, which I can see, and work from there to the top.

Most men put their trousers on before putting on their belts. That’s difficult with only one hand. It was nine months before I realized I could put the belt through the loops before putting the pants on the legs.

Next comes pulling them up and tucking in the shirttails. Since my right fingers are pretty weak, I thrust that hand deep in the side pocket. Then I can carry the weight of the

Since my stroke in December 2000, I have learned that your attitude makes a great deal of difference.

One man told me, “I don’t want to get well.” A few days later he was gone, his death wish granted. How much better it would have been if he had said with the psalmist: “This is the day which the Lord hath made; we will rejoice and be glad in it.” (Psalms 118:24 KJV). Perhaps you don’t feel very cheerful, but notice that the psalmist says, “We will rejoice and be glad.”

Being joyful or glad is not just a matter of feeling. It can be an act of the will. If you will say those words out loud, it will help to drive away any gloomy feelings.

Another thing I have learned is that no two strokes are alike, so I can’t expect your stroke experience will be like mine. But perhaps some of what I’ve learned can help you.

Your Home

If you are wheelchair bound (as I am), you may have to make a few changes in your home. Doorways must be at least 4 inches wider than the distance between your wheels. The extra inches beyond the wheels are so you can turn. If an inside doorway is too narrow you can make it wider by removing the door.

Our bathroom door is just as wide as the other inside doors, but since we need that door for privacy, we have to be satisfied with a smaller opening. The partially open door takes away 2 inches, so my wheelchair has only 29 inches to pass. That’s a squeeze, but I can make it.

Soft carpets with a long nap are hard to roll on. I persuaded our apartment’s owner to replace our carpet with a firm carpet and omit the pad. The resulting surface is just fine for me.

pants with my arm rather than with those weak fingers, and I use my good hand to tuck in the shirttails.

When it's time to close the waist, I put my right thumb through the last belt loop. I can push against this to draw the waist together to close it.

I wear a brace on my lower right leg. It goes inside my shoe. When I first came home, my wife struggled to get my shoe and brace on. But I learned an easier way: With the brace inside the shoe, I pick up the shoe by the toe and lay it down on the back of the brace. Next I step into the trough of the brace and slide my foot forward into the shoe, being careful to hold the tongue up and out of the way. I have Velcro straps instead of laces on my shoes.

Mealtime

The stroke has limited my mobility but not my appetite. I still enjoy eating, but now I use my left hand most of the time. Lately, however, I have been trying to handle a spoon or fork with my right hand. I can grip more securely with either hand if I put a piece of sponge rubber over the handle.

I choke easily on thin, cold liquids so I use a straw for

all beverages, including soups, gravies, yogurt and thin hot cereals. With a straw it is easier for me to avoid swallowing air and choking.

Recovery

I am now almost 88 years old. Although I continue to make small steps of recovery, I don't really expect to recover fully. Is there anything for an old man to look forward to except a cemetery plot? Yes indeed, there are many things to keep me busy.

I attend church, go to the exercise room and swim. I e-mail friends around the world, take their prayer requests and pray for their needs. And I enjoy corresponding with my grandchildren, sending them stories from my boyhood in China and my 25 years in the backwoods of Mindanao, Philippines. **SG**



John Schlosser