Living with stroke can be challenging and stressful. Resilience is how well we “bounce back” and keep going during difficult times. People with disabilities who are more resilient tend to be happier with their lives. They experience better moods, less pain, and fatigue.

Resilience is important to help adapt to changes after stroke. It is something that we’re born with but also something we can learn and practice. Here are some ways how we can build resilience:

• Building connections: Spend time with family, friends and other people in the community. Keep in touch with friends and family. Join local community groups, such as book clubs, exercise classes, or hobby groups. Find a local support group for stroke survivors to connect with others who may have similar experiences. Not just receiving support but also giving support can help build resilience.

Support Groups in Utah

• Finding meaning: When we focus on things that give our life meaning and purpose, it can help us respond better to stressful situations. Make time to participate in activities that have meaning to you, such as hobbies, spiritual activities, or volunteering.

• Managing feelings: It is normal to have ups and downs. When we are stressed, it’s natural to have negative feelings. But having more positive feelings can help us bounce back. Some ways to do this include focusing on the positive in a situation and reflecting on what we are grateful for every day. Using humor, such as watching a funny movie, can also be a great way to let go of stress. A professional counselor may help with particularly troublesome thoughts and feelings.

• Taking care of your health: Be physically active, eat well, and get enough rest. Learn to pace yourself and take breaks when needed to help with fatigue. Talk to your healthcare provider about managing bothersome symptoms, such as pain.
You had a stroke! Now what?
By Douglas Tapking, Stroke Survivor

The Story of my Stroke

I woke up in the hospital wrapped in a lovely "SMB" (See-More-Butt) gown and with tubes running in and out of my body. What happened? My family was there and it seemed all were talking at once. Doctors scurried around, poking, prodding, and questioning me endlessly: “Do you know where you are? What day is this? What is your name? Can you move your arms? Your legs? Can you squeeze my hand? Can you read this?”

As I drifted in and out of wakefulness, I heard someone say, "You had a stroke." Stroke! Stroke? I had a stroke?! I was so confused and so scared!

So many questions! Will I be okay? What caused the stroke? Will I have another? What are my short and long-term issues? Do I have physical, cognitive, speaking or other problems? Are they permanent? How will this affect my family and my ability to live a "normal" life? And: When can I go home?

Moving On

Healing is ongoing and I had to make some lifestyle changes. I take piano lessons now and have joined my church choir. Music engages both sides of my brain and when I can get my eyes, my brain, my hands, and my ears to all work together, music happens. That is so very satisfying!

I have been very fortunate! I no longer see bandages, scars, or anything that shows I suffered a stroke. But the damage in my right eye and to a small area of the occipital lobe of my brain is permanent. Reading is more difficult and sometimes there is a slight lag in what I see and what my brain processes. But I am told my brain is “plastic” which means other areas take over and make up for the damaged ones.

Strokes are trying for patients, families, friends, and care givers. My wife still struggles with the memory of sitting in a restaurant with friends and realizing I was having a stroke. She wondered if I would be the same person she knew or if she would even see me alive again. At times, I too, am still troubled by the memories.

Fast recognition of my stroke and immediate actions were key to my successful treatment and recovery. I asked many questions which helped me prepare for the future. I am thankful to be alive and productive. I can see. I can speak. I still enjoy family and friends and I am active in my community. I strive to live life abundantly, although I do tire quickly and find naps a blessing!

So many questions. So few answers. I wanted to know things the professionals were not always ready to tell. I did learn this: there was a blood clot in my brain and I had had an acute ischemic stroke. Fortunately, a team of skilled medical professionals was able to pull out the clot with a special catheter that trapped the clot exactly where it was.