

# Sensory Loss Management in Stroke Patients

## Introduction

This leaflet has been provided to help explain what sensory loss is and how it affects you following your stroke.

This leaflet is a guide to help inform you and your relatives or carers on how to have an active role in treating sensory loss.

## What is sensory loss?

Sensory loss can be defined as a change in sensation anywhere on the body. This can range from numbness, pins and needles and increased sensitivity.

It is estimated that 80% or 8 of every 10 patients have loss or changes in sensation after a stroke.

Sensory loss can affect people in different ways including:

- Reduced awareness of the position of your affected limb. This could result in accidental damage to your limb. For example;
  - bumping into things
  - blisters, bruises and burns on your skin
- Difficulty controlling the arm or leg, especially during precise tasks. For example:
  - using cutlery

- brushing your teeth

- Being unable to recognise familiar objects in the hand without looking at it (stereognosis)

If you have any questions about how sensory loss affects you please speak to your physiotherapist or occupational therapist.

## What can you do to help keep your limb safe?

There are plenty of things you can do to make sure your affected limb is kept safe.

Some of the following advice is commonly given by therapists to help keep your limb safe. This can also be carried out by your relatives and carers:

- Check your affected limb regularly for any injury including red marks or bruising and inform your doctor, nurse or therapist if you notice any problems.
- Be aware of the position of your affected limb. Relatives and carers can help you by prompting you to check the position of your limb when you are sitting or moving around.
- If your arm is affected; support it with pillows, when you are sitting in a chair or lying in a bed.

- If your leg is affected; when you are sitting in a chair, make sure your foot is positioned flat on the floor.
- It is important to change position at least every two hours.
- Be aware of dangers when using your limb. For example, checking the temperature of hot items with your non-affected side before carrying it, to prevent injuring your hand.
- If you are able to move your affected limb, try to use and move it as much as possible.
- You can also help to maintain movement in the hand by touching your thumb to each finger or a relative can help you to do this.

Your physiotherapist/occupational therapist can demonstrate the movements and positions that are best for you.

## Massage

Massage can be a useful technique to help improve sensory loss after stroke. It aims to provide sensory stimulation to your limb. This can help you to become more aware of your limb.

These guidelines will help show you, your relatives or carers how to massage your limb safely and effectively.

- Massage should be carried out for around 15 minutes at a time and can be repeated several times a day. Oils or cream can be used for the massage.
- Make sure that the affected limb is in a comfortable position using pillows and raised slightly if there is swelling.
- Make sure you and your relative are in a comfortable position by adjusting the bed/chair appropriately.

- Make sure you begin massage at the end of the limb, using a gentle circular motion. Move your way up the limb towards the body.
- Don't put too much pressure on your Joints or overstretch them when Massaging; especially on your hand.
- Tracing the outline of the hand/foot will help you feel the shape of your hand/foot.
- Try to look at your arm to help increase your awareness of your arm. Your relatives and carers can also remind you to do this.
- Use different textures on your skin to stimulate sensation. For example, a rough towel, toothbrush, soft hairbrush or cotton wool.

## Risks/side effects

**It is important to be aware of any potential risks:**

- **Start gently with all the tasks outlined in this leaflet to avoid damaging the skin.**
- **If you notice any breaks in the skin, abnormal swelling, bruising, pain, warmth or redness STOP immediately.**
- **Inform your therapist, nurse, GP or district nurse. You can also visit your nearest NHS walk in centre or for emergencies attend A&E.**

## Alternatives

This leaflet is a guide to inform you and your relatives on how to have an active role in managing sensory loss.

The treatments outlined in this leaflet are part of a range that will be carried out by your therapists and can be completed between therapy sessions.

If you have any questions about what is suitable and not suitable please contact your physiotherapist or occupational therapist.

**Therapist name:**

**Contact details:**

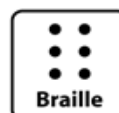
### **Further information**

Physiotherapy and Occupational Therapy department, Aintree Stroke Unit, Ward 33, Aintree University Hospital Trust, Liverpool, Lower lane, L9 7AL.

Contact Tel: 529-8042/8041

For more information you can visit these websites

- Stroke association:  
<https://www.stroke.org.uk/>
- Stroke 4 carers:  
<http://www.stroke4carers.org/>



### **If you require a special edition of this leaflet**

This leaflet is available in large print, Braille, on audio tape or disk and in other languages on request. Please contact:

**Tel No: 0151 529 2906**

**Email: [interpretationandtranslation@liverpoolft.nhs.uk](mailto:interpretationandtranslation@liverpoolft.nhs.uk)**