



It's hoped that these shared experiences will better prepare both Survivor and Caregiver for the demands and routines that will guide their journey to recovery.



During my hospital stay, my sleep was constantly challenged. Being awakened for vitals and medications, plus the extra time needed to complete my toileting took its toll on the QUALITY and AMOUNT I could enjoy each night.

I've been able to improve the quality of my sleep since returning from my hospital stay. I have been able to better regulate my sleep and with some personal research, increase the quality of the sleep I have enjoyed during my recovery.

Sleep should not be confused with rest and relaxation. Rest and relaxation are for designated times in your daytime activities. Getting ready for sleep, laying down to sleep and welcoming sleep should be reserved for the nighttime hours.

Here are the things I have learned, and try my best, to practice for getting to, and staying asleep.

SLEEP DOs

1. If I can, I get at least 1-2 hours of sunlight each day to help regulate my circadian rhythms.
2. I try to retire at roughly the same time each night and awaken at the same time each morning.
3. Most nights I fall asleep in minutes. When I don't, I lead my mind and body to sleep with activities that promote sleep. Soothing music, deep breathing or light meditation usually is helpful.
4. I try to achieve (and track) a greater ratio of deep (restful) sleep to light (disrupted) sleep.
5. I try to remember to drain my bladder completely before retiring.
6. After a especially busy day, I jot down my worries or work left undone. Resolving to take care of anything left undone tomorrow !
7. Save the bed for serious sleeping. Studies show most other activities, other than seriously committing to sleep can block the brain's transition to sleep.

Managing good sleep is just as much about the things that prevent you from enjoying a good nights sleep and its benefits in the next day's activities.

Here are the things I have learned and try my best to practice about getting to and staying asleep.

SLEEP DON'Ts

1. I try not to consume Caffeine (coffee, cola, chocolate) after lunchtime.
2. I try not to drink liquids within 2 hours of going to bed.
3. No sweets or sugars after dinner. My ratio of deep to light sleep can be reduced by too many simple sugars in my system.
4. I avoid OTC sleep remedies with PM in the name. These may have ingredients that could effect conscious memory in older persons.

TROUBLE GETTING TO SLEEP

If you can't immediately get to sleep, try sitting up in a chair and reading. Reading is not passive like surfing your device or watching TV. Reading requires me to actively exercise my brain by translating words into images and understandings.

Older folks eventually experience a reduced level of melatonin. I take Melatonin, with the supervision of my primary care physician, as an OTC aid to help me get to sleep when all else fails. It is most effective if taken at least 30 min before going to bed.

TROUBLE STAYING ASLEEP

Sleep interruptions can definitely reduce the total (light and deep) sleep attained each night. Frequent need to urinate, heart burn, and the nature calls of little Lulu can be avoided if we give her the right measure of attention before going to bed.

TROUBLE GETTING BACK TO SLEEP

Resist turning on lights, the TV or any of your devices. If you struggle to easily return to sleep Melatonin may help.

I've found that another benefit of having an Apple Watch is the monitoring of my sleep vitals during sleep and the subsequent reporting on the success of each night's sleep. This is easily achieved with the addition of the SleepWatch app.

I find the data collected each night regarding my sleep to be absolutely fascinating. This debunks the notion that because your eyes are closed you are not just asleep. The body and mind adjust their rhythms second by second the whole night through. What might seem like sleep, is not all quality sleep. It is a mixture of light sleep (cat nap) and restful (dream filled) sleep. You have ups and downs in the quality of sleep. These alterations can be examined each morning to **assess the quality of your sleep each morning**. The tracking allows me to look back on each night's sleep with personal insights to what contributed to, or detracted from my sleep total!



Bottom line - Sleep, and particularly its management, is absolutely important to my recovery as a Stroke Survivor. Knowing what I did and didn't do during my nighttime hours helps me to know what needs attention each day, and particularly each evening, before I retire.



SleepWatch®

Ten Reasons I Rely On Sleep Watch

1. Scores My Sleep
2. Tracks Time Awake
3. Tracks Light Sleep
4. Tracks Restful Sleep
5. Tracks Goals
6. Displays Patterns
7. Records Restful Sleep
8. Tracks Heart Rate Dips
9. Records Heart BPM
10. HRV Intervals

Rest and Relaxation



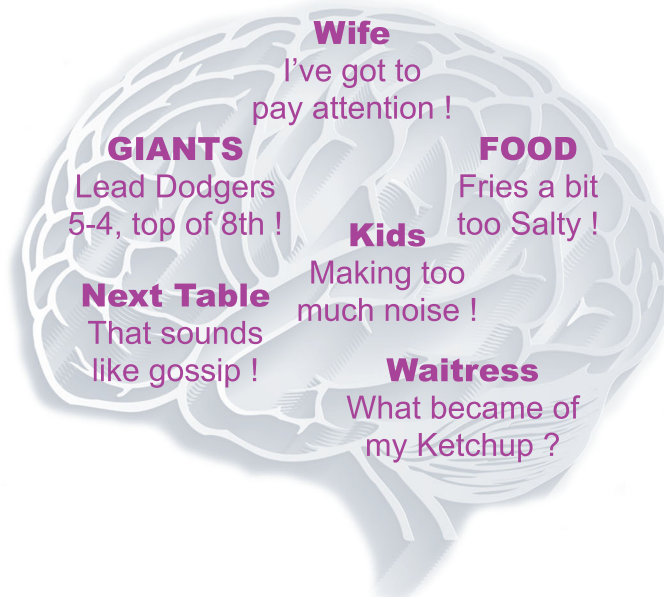
Rest, not to be confused with sleep, is especially important for a Stroke Survivor. To make a success of my entire day I must first have a good night's sleep. Then, I must plan to have islands of rest (minimum 30 minutes each) periodically in my day. I will need these rest periods because **two things will have TAXED MY BRAIN - thoughts and muscle commands.** This was true in the beginning of my recovery, but even more pronounced as my recovery progressed. My desire to gradually increase my strength and the hours of research, writing and design needed to develop the Stroke Angel Project made my need for periodic rest more pronounced.

A TYPICAL DAY

On a really good day, I will exercise, work at my computer, and then have some leisure activity in the evening. To accomplish all this I will have needed to manage my energy. Let's say I take my wife out to dinner at a busy Sports Bar and we're seated in amongst a crowd of sports fanatics. The place is jumpin. As I sit there my less than perfect brain is trying to consciously keep track of the kaleidoscope of conscious and unconscious inputs and stimuli. What to pick from the too busy menu. Bits of conversations from several of the surrounding tables. Flashes of information from the half dozen giant overhead screens.

Unconsciously, my brain is trying to keep track of the room temperature, shifts in lighting, the coming and going of wait staff, cadence of eating and drinking. All these are inputs mixed with side thoughts about tomorrow's PT session and other things on my schedule . . . all while trying to be attentive to my wife.

I will have tried to enjoy myself (especially if my favorite team wins) and maybe succeed IF I had readied myself with enough rest during the day. But, the enjoyment will have come at a cost. All of that brain activity in as harmless a setting at the sports bar, will have taxed me to my new limits. I will indeed have spent the energy allotment stored in my brain.



Rest and Relaxation



Relaxation

Likewise, relaxation should not be confused with rest. For me, rest is in my body and brain. Relaxation is in my soul. You will recall my life was very chaotic leading up to my Stroke. Something very profound happened to me on the afternoon of my second day of hospitalization. I was alone, had finished my lunch, and my device was turned off. Most importantly, all my questions and concerns of that morning had been addressed by my doctors and nurses. What happened then will remain in my memory til I'm gone. Without thinking about it, I found myself in a state of complete contentment. I was fully rested. There were no distractions, or topics vying for my attention. I just laid there with a feeling of relaxation I could not remember having for a long, long time. It was a startling realization - I was totally, and completely relaxed ! I was able to capture this feeling again several times while still in the hospital. Especially because my recovery, by all accounts, was progressing well.

How I Do It !

Looking back, and as profound as these experiences were, my total relaxation could only occur if these factors were in play:

Rested

Relaxation is not a nap or a good nights sleep. They are only prerequisite of rest.

Peaceful

This a unique combination of a quiet body and mind.

Worry-less

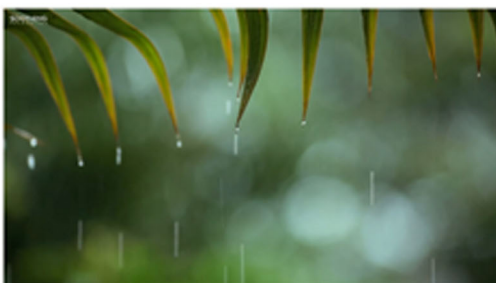
Worries, while still real, have been put in perspective. They need not be addressed while I am relaxing in my lounge chair. Worries could wait !

Comfortable

Relaxation does not come to a body that is chilled or overheated. I often found comfort under a light blanket, with my feet elevated.

Rhythmic Oscillation

It could have been the ticking of an antique clock, even a metronome. But, for me it was a You Tube relaxation tune, with delicate piano notes, set at a very low volume on my device and placed screen down on my sternum. Sounds crazy. But, I could feel the vibration of each softly played piano key resonating through my body from top to toe. And here's the key - if I let my mind concentrate on ONLY each note - it helped keep stray thoughts and detractions from entering my mind. It helped to empty my mind. From my earliest days in hospital to now I still enjoy the form of relaxation. *Try It !*

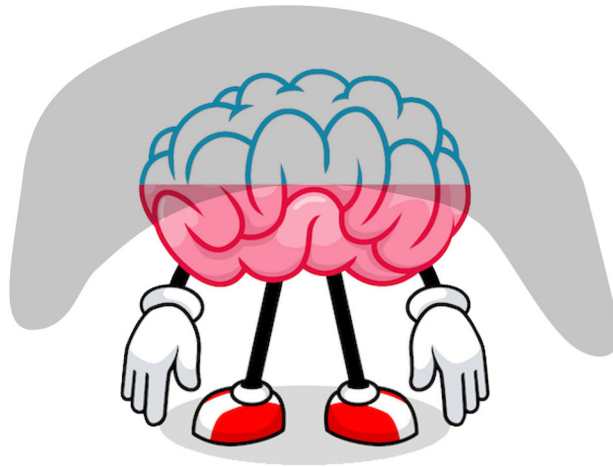


YouTube

Relaxing Music & Rain Sounds
Beautiful Piano Music,
Background Music, Sleep Music
81M Views

I guess if my Recovery has
an anthem, this would be it !

Fatigue



**Fatigue Settles On Me Like A Shroud.
It Drains My Brain Of The Will
To Do Almost Anything !**

Fatigue - “ The Rat In The Woodpile ”

FATIGUE is one of the MOST common experiences shared by Stroke Survivors. I did not experience this sensation until the very early part of my fourth month in recovery. It entered my life for the first time the day after one of the most energetically active days to date in my recovery. This was the only time I experienced fatigue early in the day. It lasted all day. Looking back, it appears that I had used up all my energy, including my reserve, the day before and I was so severely drained that I left the door open for this rat to sneak in and become an unwelcome, yet undeniable, part of my life in recovery.

In the next six months I was to experience **PURE FATIGUE** a total of eight times. These were not periods of ordinary tiredness that I still experience regularly. These were distinct and undeniable episodes of total fatigue. They have come before and after periods of activity. There is no forewarning. Nothing that sends the warning “ look out, here it comes ! ” The single most indelible episode hit me mid-day after returning from a trip to the grocery store with my wife.

As we pulled up in front of my house, I could feel my strength draining away. By the time we stopped at the curb, this heavy shroud like feeling had descended and covered my whole body. It very quickly sapped so much of my will that I could barely move my hand to the door handle !

I often refer to my fatigue as the “ Rat In The Wood Pile ”. I know it’s lurking in there somewhere. I just don’t know when it will sneak out and attack me. Or, how long it will visit me on that day. Because of its unpredictability, I don’t consider it in my plans for each day. I concentrate instead on my levels of energy as judged in each individual day.

For example, if I know I am going to have a particularly active day tomorrow - I try to keep my activity level today at a minimum. Conversely, if I have a very active day today - I likely will have to rest more the following day. This is my most successful approach, at least for where I am in my recovery to date.

And, if on any day, fatigue should sneak out of the woodpile, I will just have to be patient and deal with it. To date, my encounters with fatigue lasted from 4-6 hours.