



Question #26:

Re: Numbness

Q: I experience ongoing numbness. My right hand has not lost any strength or dexterity, but feels constantly as if I am wearing a glove. This feeling intensifies from time to time; mostly at night when I am resting or sleeping. The numbness on the right side of my face behaves in the same manner. My right shoulder sometimes feels heavy and slightly painful, but I do have full range of motion. Do other stroke survivors go through this and what, if anything, can be done to ease this discomfort. I consider myself fortunate that this is the maximum physical deficit that I have. Ninety-nine percent of the time I have this “psychological damage” (I call it “shadows”) under control.

Answered by:

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Answer:

A: Please be aware that "shadows" are extremely common after certain types of strokes. In fact, strokes that affect sensation and cause numbness or tingling, can often cause uncomfortable sensations which may persist for years or indefinitely. Sometimes, the discomfort may be so severe that the sensations become actually painful. The important thing to know is that these worsening sensations over time do not imply additional strokes or damage to the brain; such sensations are a kind of "after effect" or "byproduct" of the initial stroke. They are attributed to a type of abnormal post-stroke "rewiring" which affects sensory pathways. If the sensations become very unpleasant, there are certain medications which may help. Some of the older antidepressant medications, e.g. Amitriptyline (Elavil) may be helpful even though the person may not be depressed. Amitriptyline may have multiple side effects, however. More modern medications such as Neurontin (gabapentin) or Lyrica (pregabalin) may also be useful with fewer side effects. These medications should only be used if the abnormal sensations are interfering with your quality-of-life. Remember that you can be reassured that these sensations are common after stroke and not dangerous. Sometimes, that reassurance is better than any medication!