

Older, active, confident stroke caregivers are happiest

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Stroke caregivers are happier when they continue to enjoy their own hobbies and interests, according to new research in the American Heart Association journal *Stroke*.

Researchers used several questionnaires to assess well-being after one year among 399 [family members](#) caring for a loved one who survived a stroke. The caregivers were mostly women (69 percent) and married to the person they were caring for (70 percent).

In a two-year follow-up, 80 of the caregivers completed the questionnaires again, with most of their answers similar to those at the end of one year.

Researchers found that the happiest caregivers were also:

- older (average age 58) and in better physical health;
- maintaining their own hobbies and activities;
- providing higher levels of assistance to [stroke survivors](#); and
- caring for someone with less cognitive impairment, memory problems or depression.

"I was most surprised that caregivers were happier when caring for a family member who survived a more severe stroke," said Jill Cameron, Ph.D., lead author of the study and an associate professor in the Department of Occupational Science and Occupational Therapy in the Graduate Department of Rehabilitation Science at the University of

Toronto. "But when a stroke is labeled mild, expectations are high and the issues are more subtle. That can cause more frustration because survivors of a [mild stroke](#) still have problems."

Because stroke is a sudden event, survivors can often be home from the hospital just days or weeks after, giving the [family caregiver](#) very little time to prepare.

"That might be one reason older caregivers are the most content," Cameron said. "They're more likely to be retired and less likely to have to juggle responsibilities of a job and children along with providing post-stroke care."

Depression, cognitive issues and [memory problems](#) had a negative impact on the well-being of the caregiver. That may be because health systems tend to offer more resources to help caregivers handle physical disability than problems with thinking, memory, behavior and mood, Cameron said.

The caregiver's attitude also impacts their happiness. If the caregiver feels they can handle taking care of their family member and that they will grow from the experience, and they continue to take part in activities that interest them, they are happier, she said.

Researchers said learning which factors led to more content [caregivers](#) will allow the healthcare system to make adjustments to better support stroke survivors and their families.

"If the family is doing better, that helps the patient do better," Cameron said.

The study only included those caring for stroke survivors who came home from the hospital after their first [stroke](#), not those who were sent

to nursing facilities.

Provided by American Heart Association

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