
HOW I FEEL NOW

I'm often asked how I function now, years after suffering my hemorrhagic stroke. My inclination is to smile broadly and say that I'm doing great, because being positive and upbeat helps me to focus on my life, and not my afflictions. But truth to tell, it is an ongoing battle, one that I wage every day of my life, to keep from being consumed by the debilitation of stroke.

A massive brain hemorrhage cuts off blood and nutrients to the brain, causing severe brain cell loss. In my case, it happened to the right frontal lobe. This particular area of brain real estate is responsible for small and large motor control on the left side of the body. Imagine a line from your forehead straight down the middle of your body. That's the line between fully functioning right side and a left side that doesn't know how to work, act, or feel. The right side of my brain isn't aware that the left side exists. I have impaired sensation and numbness up and down my left side; yet, oddly enough I have hypersensitivity to pain and extremes such as hot and cold.

If you could strap 50 lb weights to your left wrist and ankle then tighten every muscle on that side as if poised to fight, you'd get a sense of how my body feels. Close your eyes and look to left. That's how it is for me with my eyes open: my left side doesn't exist. To make my limbs work, I have to concentrate and use visual cues as to where my limbs are in space. Now try going about your daily routine, using only your right side. How about going to the bathroom with only one hand—that's something I have to deal with all the time. When climbing stairs, I have to consciously raise my dead left leg to clear the riser. When you do these activities, you don't have to think about it because your brain sends the impulses that control motor function. My brain doesn't work that way anymore.

More downside.--with my gait and spasticity, the years have taken a toll on other parts of my body. I have chronic bursitis in my hips, carpal tunnel on my right hand from overuse, tendonitis in both knees; and arthritis beyond my years. My circulation on the left side is impaired which leaves my limbs discolored and swollen.

There is an upside, though. I've found that if you have the resolve and stay positive, you can train yourself to compensate. For example, at the time of my stroke my son had not yet learned to tie his shoes. When the situation arose, I'd have to rely on the kindness of strangers for assistance. But through willpower and a lot of practice, I'm now able to tie shoes one-handed—no mean feat. Just don't bring a stopwatch. I know that my left hand will always misbehave, but I refuse to give in to its desire to be ignored. So I decorate it with jewelry and make every effort to involve it.