Attitudes and understanding of exercise and healthy lifestyles in people with mild to moderate sub-acute stroke

Nicola Clague-Baker, Prof Tom Robinson, Prof Sally Singh, Dr Chris Carpenter, Annegret Hagenberg, Sophie Drewry,
Background

Attitudes towards Healthy lifestyles particularly Exercise –

• Barriers to exercise – **physical, motivational** and **environmental**
  (Damush 2007, Simpson 2011) – **chronic** stroke

Knowledge of Healthy lifestyles particularly exercise –

• **33%** stroke patients not given advice about **physical exercise** (HCs 2005)
• **54%** stroke patients not given information about **stroke prevention**
  (SA 2006)
• Information **confusing** (Lawrence 2010) - **chronic**
• Information **recall** - **poor** (Hillsdon 2013) - **chronic**
Aim of study

• This study aimed to explore sub-acute stroke patients’ experiences after stroke and their attitudes to, and understanding of, recommended levels of exercise and living a healthy lifestyle.
Method

• Qualitative interpretive phenomenological approach.

• **20** participants with **mild to moderate sub-acute stroke**

• Semi-structured in-depth interviews

• Analysis by the PI and expert qualitative researcher

• Member checking – 2 transcripts
Results

• 20 participants (12 male), mean age 66 years (range 30 to 88)

• Ethnicity - 14 Caucasian, 4 Asian and 2 Afro-Caribbean

• NIHSS – mean score 3 (range 1 to 8)

• Average length of time post stroke in days – 59 days (range 14 – 124)

• Seven of the participants were accompanied by their carer
2 main themes

Attitudes to Healthy Lifestyle

Knowledge of Healthy Lifestyle
Attitudes to healthy lifestyle

Positive
- Giving up smoking
- Diet
- Exercise

Negative
- Barriers
- Doubts
- Lack of agreement
Summary - Attitudes towards a healthy lifestyle and fitness

- Majority of participants wanted to live a healthy lifestyle
- Most were active prior to the stroke but not enough to challenge their cardiovascular system
- A number of barriers to exercise were identified
- A number of patients had doubts about the impact of a healthy lifestyle
Knowledge of healthy lifestyle

Fitness
- Benefits
  - Independence
  - Psychological
  - Social
  - Weight control
- Guidelines
Risk factors
Cause
Advice

“I think it gives you a positive outlook” P2

“I looked at it that I’m going to lose weight and that’s it” P14

“No one mentioned the benefit of fitness and prevention of illness.”

“We just went for the social aspect of it” P1
Majority had not ever thought about it: 

P3 “I didn’t think about it, I didn’t realise that exercise could help with a stroke”
Over half the participants did not know any of the risk factors that could lead to a stroke with one saying:

“No I didn’t know there were any risks”

P15 and he had diabetes.
Over half the participants did not know the cause of their stroke. Participants identified the importance of knowing the cause of their stroke so they knew how to change their lifestyle.
Knowledge of healthy lifestyle

Fitness

Very few talked about advice they had been given about maintaining their fitness

Risk factors

“They didn’t talk about general fitness” P6

Cause

“I haven’t been told anything” P9

Advice

Exercise

Other areas of advice

Source

Healthy Lifestyle advice other than exercise the lack of information was the main response
The majority of the participants (over 60 years old) did not feel comfortable using online information.

"I have not had a chance to read them. They were useful but perhaps if someone did actually say well look if you have this or do that.” P17
Summary - Knowledge of Healthy Lifestyles

• No one mentioned the benefit of exercise related to prevention of illness

• Only two participants knew anything about cardiovascular fitness guidelines

• Over half the participants did not know any of the risk factors

• Over half the participants did not know why they had had a stroke

• Very few talked about advice they had been given about maintaining their fitness

• Very few participants had been given Healthy Lifestyle advice in person, a few had been given written information but had not read it.
Conclusion

• Sub-acute stroke patients appear to have positive attitudes towards exercise and healthy lifestyles.
• A number of barriers identified that limited participation in exercise
• Knowledge of cardiovascular exercise, healthy living, risk factors and prevention of illness is limited.
• Do not appear to have been given advice on cardiovascular exercise or healthy lifestyles
Take home message

• Despite recommendations stroke patients do not report hearing healthy lifestyle messages.

• Stroke Physiotherapists need to ensure they provide individualised advice for stroke patients on cardiovascular fitness, healthy living, risk factors and illness prevention.

• Future research is needed to identify the most effective way of providing this advice for people with stroke.
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• Contact details – njc36@le.ac.uk
  Nicola.clague@uhl-tr.nhs.uk

• Twitter @ClagueNjc36
  – Stroke Fitness @NikkiClague
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