



Survivors Speak: Frank Austin

Finding Hope After a Stroke

Life can change completely - sometimes overnight.

On April 12, 2008, Kitchener resident Frank Austin had a major stroke at 42 years old. Frank has chronic sleep apnea, and wasn't sleeping with his continuous oxygen mask that night. As soon as he woke up, he knew he'd had a stroke. He could only move his left hand and could barely breathe. The first two days Frank spent in the hospital remain a complete blur and his physical recovery took over five months. But while Frank made great progress physically, he was left with what many call an 'invisible disability' – aphasia. He had significant

challenges with his cognitive reasoning, speech and reading.

Having a stroke at any time causes major upheavals, but when you have a stroke in the prime of your life, there are a different set of challenges. Frank was a young man, about to embark on a new career as a personal support worker for children with disabilities. He describes the week before his stroke as a 'great one'. He had taken his little boy to school and had been offered a full-time job. The stroke Frank says, effectively 'killed his career'.

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Nutrition – A Healthy Diet for Stroke Survivors

Figuring out what to eat to stay healthy is difficult under the best of circumstances. After a stroke, it's a bit harder - but not impossible! While stroke survivors are encouraged to follow particular recommendations, healthy eating is really the same for everyone. Follow these tips to function at your best.

Eating fruits and vegetables is recommended for everyone, but taking in five servings a day is especially important for avoiding another stroke, as this practice lowers stroke risk by 30%, according to a Harvard University study. The National Stroke Association (www.stroke.org) particularly

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Depression and Stroke

A study published March 15, 2011 in *Neurology*, revealed that one third of stroke survivors deal with post-stroke depression, and that depression, along with other factors, can lead survivors to being more dependent on caregivers, leading to a slower recovery process. (<http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2011/03/110314163427.htm>)

While it is natural to be upset or sad after a stroke in the course of the healing process, depression can become an all-encompassing hindrance to one's independence if left untreated, and is associated with the worsening of a number of other health problems. Be on the lookout for signs of depression. Meet with your doctor to discuss a treatment plan if you notice these warning signs.

Warning signs can include:

- Loss of interest in activities (hobbies, social activities) that were previously fun
- Feeling helpless, guilty, or worthless; always feeling sad or "empty"
- Constant crying or irritability
- Severely diminished or non-existent libido
- Inability to sleep, or inability to stop sleeping
- Unusual weight loss (and lack of appetite) or weight gain
- Difficulty concentrating, making choices, recalling important details, often accompanied by fatigue and the feeling of living in "slow motion"
- Thoughts or plans of suicide
- Chronic pain with no known cause or effective treatment

There are many different treatments that help fight depression, including therapy, anti-depressant medication, peer support, and lifestyle changes.

A consultation with a doctor will help find the most effective combination.

In the field of therapy, a new study suggests "Motivational Interviewing," a talk-based therapy that identifies patients' thoughts and fears about recovery and the future, and the patients' confidence level in taking on potential anticipated hurdles, may be an effective therapeutic intervention for depression in stroke survivors, particularly when delivered early on in the survivor's journey. (June 23, 2011; *Stroke: Journal of the American Heart Association*)

The therapy is largely patient-driven, suggesting this therapy is easily replicated in a health care setting and that defining expectations and goals by oneself, or with the caregiver or family, may be helpful for stroke survivors.

Prescription anti-depressants are the most common depression treatment, but should only be used under the supervision of a physician.

One of the most useful ways to recover from depression is peer support. The most important thing for stroke survivors to know is that they are not alone and there is help, from such organizations as Stroke Recovery Canada. Peer support offers both the advice and friendship of others who have been through the same experience, and is a great way to socialize. Peer support isn't just for stroke survivors; family members and caregivers may also be at risk for experiencing depression, and are similarly encouraged to visit a health professional and reach out for peer support if feeling overwhelmed.

For more information on peer support groups or to locate one in your community please call our Warmline® toll-free at 1-888-540-6666, e-mail info@stroke-recoverycanada.com or visit our Web site at www.marchofdimes.ca/src.

Bret “The Hitman” Hart



Bret Hart filming a public service announcement in April, 2010

“Never give up and never despair. It will get better.”

For over 20 years Bret entertained fans around the world winning numerous wrestling championships and has become one of Canada’s most recognizable icons.

In 2002, Bret overcame a devastating stroke, a defeat he calls his greatest victory. Bret’s stroke caused partial paralysis requiring months of physical therapy, but through his determination, he made a successful recovery.

Since then, Bret published his memoirs, titled: **Hitman: My Real Life in the Cartoon World of Wrestling**. The hardcover book was a bestseller, and it has now been released in softcover. More recently, Bret made a triumphant return to wrestling, taking part in Wrestlemania 26.

Over the past four years, Bret has been helping March of Dimes with its mission to educate Canadian stroke

survivors about how to “Survive and Thrive” after a stroke.

He made a series of appearances in Toronto in October 2011, doing the ceremonial kick-off at an Argos game and signing autographs at the Mt. Pleasant BIA Village Fall Fair.



Bret Hart taking part at the Mt. Pleasant BIA Village Fall Fair.

“Walk ‘n’ Roll!”

2012 will mark the fourth year of this great event as it expands nationally!

Participants raise pledges from friends, family, neighbours, coworkers, etc., in return for a commitment to walk, or roll at a local mall.

Walk ‘n’ Roll is the perfect opportunity for volunteers or fitness groups to get active, improve their fitness, foster a spirit of community involvement and support a great cause. The event is open to people of all ages and abilities. Proceeds raised help support stroke and polio survivors, people with an acquired brain

injury and other people with disabilities, as well as in part fund March of Dimes’ critical programs and services.

In 2011, Walk ‘n’ Roll events raised over \$30,000 for stroke, polio and ABI support groups. We are confident we can do even better in 2012!

Our next “Walk ‘n’ Roll” is scheduled for the first weekend in April, 2012.

For more information, or to set up your own fundraiser, please call 416-425-3463 ext. 7207.

HAVE YOU CONSIDERED... Making a Charitable Will Bequest

- Many Canadians support charitable organizations through future gifts from their estates by including a Charitable Will Bequest.
- A Charitable Will Bequest is a direction in your Will that instructs your Executor(s)/Trustee(s) to leave one or more of your assets to a charitable organization.
- A Charitable Will Bequest is one way to support March of Dimes while achieving significant tax savings for your estate by reducing or even eliminating your income tax liability in the year of death.
- A Charitable Will Bequest can increase inheritances to your loved ones by reducing taxes and help March of Dimes continue to provide a wide range of services to people with physical disabilities. .

Making a Gift of Securities

Since May 2, 2006 the Canadian government has eliminated capital gains tax on donations of publicly listed securities to charities. By donating stocks or mutual funds that have grown in value to March of Dimes you will not have to pay the capital gains tax you would otherwise owe. And you can make a significant gift at the same time! This is a great way for you to support March of Dimes.

For further Information

Please contact Margaret Purcell at mpurcell@marchofdimes.ca or 1-800-263-3463 ext. 7342.

March of Dimes strongly recommends that you seek professional advice to ensure your financial goals are met.

How to Maintain Your Assistive Device

Purchasing any assistive device, from a cane to a bath seat and anything in between, is like making any other good investment. You want it to benefit you or your loved one for a long time. Regular maintenance plays a key role in getting the most out of your investment. You'll be surprised at how even just a little bit of care can go a long way.

We'll begin with the body of the device, for example the frame of a walker. Any hard surface, including plastics, should be cleaned once a week with a damp cloth and dried immediately afterwards. Leaving behind moisture may not only cause rust on certain materials but may also leave the surface slippery and therefore dangerous to the user. Abrasive cleaners like an SOS pad should never be used on metals or painted surfaces as they will cause scratches.

If your device has upholstery, like the vinyl seat found on a wheelchair, it should be cleaned at the same time as you clean the body. Pay close attention to any areas of the upholstery which are worn or torn. Torn upholstery should be replaced immediately as it may pose a risk to the user. Remember, for example, that a seat on a wheelchair is the primary source of weight support for that device.

The wheels on your device should be inspected every two weeks for signs of wobbling or looseness. Once retightened, if the wheels still wobble your device should be taken in to be serviced by a technician. At the same time inspect the tires to make sure there



are no cracks or overly worn areas which will cause difficulty in propelling and maneuvering. If a new tire is needed, replace both sides to maintain proper balance since worn tires have a smaller diameter. If you have pneumatic tires now is also a good time to check the air pressure.

Once a month you should ensure that, if equipped, the brakes on your assistive device function well. If you are unsure how to adjust them ask someone with experience to help you - before using the device again ensure the brakes are working properly or you may injure yourself or your loved one.

Moving parts should be properly lubricated at all times. A light oil or dry lube like those used by bicycle mechanics will work well. Do not use WD40 on parts which are constantly in motion, such as a chain, as it is too light a lubricant. It can however, be used to fix squeaky hinges or loosen tight screws and knobs. Moving parts also need to be cleaned of any lint, thread or dirt that may be caught in them.

If not permanently installed, your assistive device should be stored in a clean and dry area. If stored for more than a few months your device should be inspected prior to use. Reading these tips takes longer than actually carrying them out, so have patience and maintain your investment. You'll be glad you did!

*Submitted by Michael Izzo, AMG Medical Supplies Inc.
www.amgmedical.com*

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Although his life was now on a new and completely unexpected path, Frank is a determined man who wanted to both improve his speech and continue to contribute to others with disabilities, as he had trained to do before his stroke.

Part of his recovery involved becoming a part of the Linking Survivors with Survivors (LSWS) program of Stroke Recovery Canada®. Linking Survivors with Survivors is a volunteer driven project connecting new stroke survivors with individuals who have already made successful recoveries from stroke. Frank was already familiar with March of Dimes from his work as a Personal Support Worker and went to the local office for help. He was connected with LSWS and quickly signed up as a 'friendly visitor'.

Through hospital visits, community involvement and peer support groups, new stroke survivors benefit from mentorship and gain a better understanding about their own path of stroke recovery. Linking Survivors with Survivors is a joint initiative of the: Kitchener Waterloo, North Wellington, Guelph Wellington, Cambridge and District Chapters of Stroke Recovery Canada®, in partnership with Grand River Hospital Stroke Centre and South Regional Stroke Network. It is funded through the Waterloo-Wellington Local Health Integration Network.

In addition to his work with LSWS, Frank also started a local conversation group for people with aphasia. He was keen to join a group to improve his own speech but the nearest group was in Georgetown – a two hour drive away. He still went frequently but campaigned to start a group in his community. Thanks to Frank's efforts, a pilot project was started with support from the University of Waterloo. 7 people regularly attend the conversation group two hours a week, and over 20 are on the waiting list, proving the need in the community.

Frank still lives with aphasia; he can't read out loud and still struggles with word-finding difficulties, but

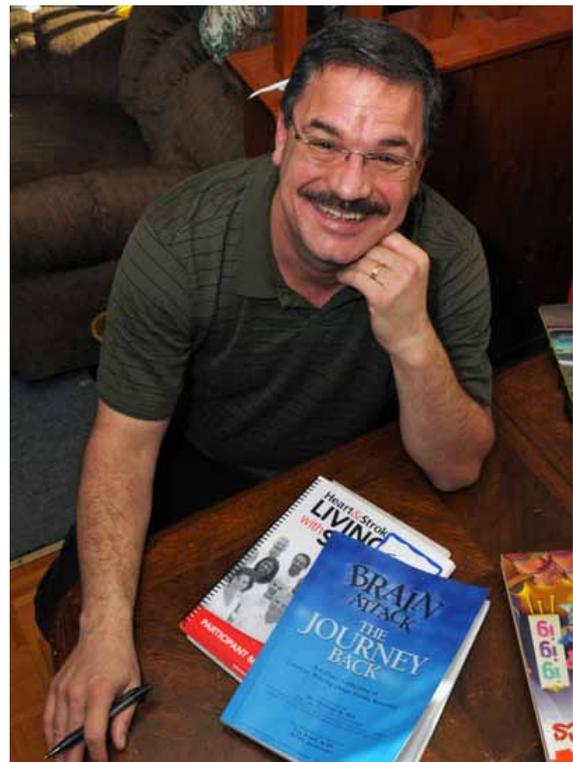
credits hard work, support from therapists and the conversation group for helping him improve his communication tremendously.

"Linking Survivors with Survivors and the Conversation Group have become really big parts of my life," says Frank. "I get a real sense of fulfillment knowing I am helping people – and when I do my hospital visits, even though it is difficult for both me and the new survivor, I really do have a blast," he continues.

"We're just talking, but hearing from somebody who's been there, it means so much, you can see it in their eyes – they thank me for visiting and I thank them for what they give to me."

For more information about the Conversation Group please visit Frank's website at www.kwstrokesurvivor.com

For more information about Linking Survivors with Survivors, please visit www.marchofdimes.ca/lsws



Nutrition – A Healthy Diet for Stroke Survivors

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recommends citrus fruits, cauliflower, and broccoli, as their high concentrations of potassium, folic acid and fibre are a formidable combo against both stroke and heart disease. Most people only get half of this requirement, so be aware of how much you're getting (or not getting)! If you find it's hard to incorporate fruit and vegetables, you can make a smoothie with whole fruit and yogurt in the morning, or toss some berries into oatmeal. Vegetables can be side dishes, eaten by themselves or incorporated into other things (you can sneak cauliflower puree into mashed potatoes, for example, or grate vegetables into meat or pasta), soups, or even be drinkable. If you do drink your fruit and veggies, be aware that fruit juice is high in sugar and carbohydrates (one glass of orange juice can be the equivalent of eight oranges), and often doesn't contain fibre, making it less filling.

Cutting down on salt is essential for lowering blood pressure. High blood pressure is a risk factor for stroke. Try flavouring meals with fresh and dried herbs and spices, or spice blends that do not contain salt. Restaurant meals tend to be high in salt, so be aware of this and what you're ordering. See if nutrition

information is available to make healthier choices, and don't add salt at the table, especially before you've tasted the meal. Another way to lower blood pressure is by increasing potassium intake with foods like bananas and tomatoes. Potassium can also help regulate heart rhythm.

A lower-fat diet that is focused on healthy fats is ideal for stroke survivors. Grilling instead of frying, using low-fat dairy and meat, and eating egg whites without yolks are all ways to cut down on fat. Fibre both fights fat and makes you feel full, lowering appetite. Following these tips will also help manage weight, which can contribute to stroke. If you eat meat, eating fish two or three times a week is a great way to get some heart-healthy Omega-3 fats in your diet. Broiling or frying negates these fats, so try broiling or baking your fish (or a trip to your local sushi restaurant)! Omega-3 supplements can be helpful if you don't eat fish, but look for a reputable company name, take them with food, and advise your doctor before taking them if you are using blood thinners.

Finally, get your vitamins. There is a building block of protein, or an amino acid, in the body called homocystein. Too much of it in the blood is a warning sign for stroke. Though you can't change how much naturally appears in your bloodstream because of genetics, lifestyle plays a factor. Increasing Vitamin B6 and Vitamin B12 (fortified cereals, low-fat milk, fish, baked potatoes, watermelon) and folic acid (pasta, rice, lentils, asparagus) in your diet can lower homocysteine levels.

Happy Eating!

Caregiver's Corner Online Resources

Caregiving is a kind and loving act, but due to its constant and difficult nature, it can lead to stress and eventual "burnout." Try some of these tips to ease stress before it builds up.

1. Reach out to others; join a peer support group or have a standing coffee date with a sympathetic friend.
2. Watch out for symptoms of depression and speak to a doctor as soon as possible if they occur.
3. If at all possible, try to arrange days for yourself every once in a while. Everyone needs a break!
4. If you can't find a whole day to relax, taking half an hour or even five minutes to centre yourself with meditation or yoga can be very calming.
5. Repeat daily positive affirmations about your goals and how you want to feel.
6. A massage can help work all that stress out of your back. If cost is an issue, try a discounted session at a college that teaches massage therapy. Websites such as Dealicious and LivingSocial often offer discounted massage or spa deals. Lower body and stretching exercises can also make you feel better physically.
7. If help is offered, accept it even if you don't think need it. If nobody offers, don't be afraid or embarrassed to ask; some people don't realize what they can do, but if given a specific task, will be happy to take it on.
8. Know as much as you can about your loved one's condition, and your needs and rights as a caregiver.
9. Allow yourself to experience feelings of grief and sadness. You can't move on to your future hopes without coming to terms with the loss.
10. Go online and find communities and websites that can provide further help.

Reader Survey: *What did you think of this issue?*

- Excellent, keep up the good work
- Could use more information on (check the appropriate box)
 - Medical research and treatment
 - Sexuality and dating
 - Depression
 - Family caregiver issues
 - Rehabilitation options
 - Other: _____

Comments _____



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- Are you a: stroke survivor family/friend
 healthcare professional other: _____

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