## STROKE AND DEPRESSION

My wife had a minor stroke six months ago and has experienced some depression since. Is this common? Do you have any recommendations?



DR. SEEMANT CHATURVEDI **RESPONDS:** 

Depression is quite common after a stroke. It is estimated to occur in 20 to 30 percent of stroke survivors. In some cases, it can be a reaction to new physical deficits or the sudden change in life circumstances brought about by the stroke. In other instances, even with relatively minor physical deficits, depression can occur and may be due to biochemical changes in the brain.

Treatment can be focused on factors such as lifestyle, counseling, or medication. Participation in stroke support groups or a structured exercise program reduces stress and anxiety for some patients. Counseling sessions provide an outlet for expressing fears and frustrations. Finally, some patients improve with the commonly used antidepressants.

In many cases, post-stroke depression resolves within six to 12 months.

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## GUILLAIN-BARRÉ SYNDROME

I have had Guillain-Barré Syndrome (GBS). Can I get the flu shot?



DR. TED M. **RESPONDS:** 

For a patient who has had GBS, there's no easy answer to the question of whether or not to get the flu vaccine. The former GBS patient should carefully discuss the pros and cons of flu vaccine with his or her doctor.

When making this decision, there are a few things that should be kept in mind that can assist in making this decision (see box).

Ted M. Burns, M.D., is associate professor of neurology at the University of Virginia.

## **FACTORS TO CONSIDER:**

- ▶ If your prior GBS occurred weeks after a flu vaccine, you should strongly consider avoiding future flu vaccines.
- It is probably best to skip the flu vaccine for a year or so following the episode of GBS.
- ▶ Remember that influenza illness is potentially dangerous, and there is some evidence in the medical literature that suggests influenza illness might—although rarely—trigger cases of GBS.
- Know that there are many former GBS patients who have received subsequent flu vaccines without complication.
- Lastly, the likelihood of a recurrence of GBS following flu vaccine is quite low. For example, the evidence in the medical literature suggests that less than 5 percent of former GBS patients will experience mild symptoms suggestive of a relapse following vaccination. These symptoms are almost always very mild and self-limiting.