National Stroke Nursing Forum

Periods and stroke recovery: the conversation we forget to have

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Why it is important

More women are surviving stroke at younger ages

Women have stroke-specific reproductive and hormonal health considerations

Secondary stroke prevention may affect menstruation and reproductive and hormonal health.

Hormonal cycles may affect rehabilitation.

What prompted me to think about this?

Two women independently reported **stopping anti-coagulant medication** due to unmanageable periods.

Had I ever asked women specifically about their periods?

Asking women about periods

- No information after stroke
- No discussion of periods
- No discussion of contraception
- No discussion of menopause
- No signposting to support
- **Nobody ever talked to me about it.**

It’s not just about periods

‘You literally didn't want to leave the house’

‘I couldn't leave the house really because it was just torrential.’

Around **70% of menstruating women taking oral anticoagulants** experience clinically significant heavy menstrual bleeding.

(Bannelow 2020)

Stroke specific challenges

Aphasia

- Unable to ask for pads (in hospital)
- Asking for assistance

Physical disability

- One-handed management
- Ability to get to a private place

Dependency

- Who can help?

Cognition

- Remembering
- Planning

Challenges to rehabilitation

Participants described worsening

- Fatigue
- Brain fog
- Aphasia
- Neuropathic pain
- Mood

“As I get nearer to my period, all the things that were difficult in the early days after stroke feel like they return.”

Contraception

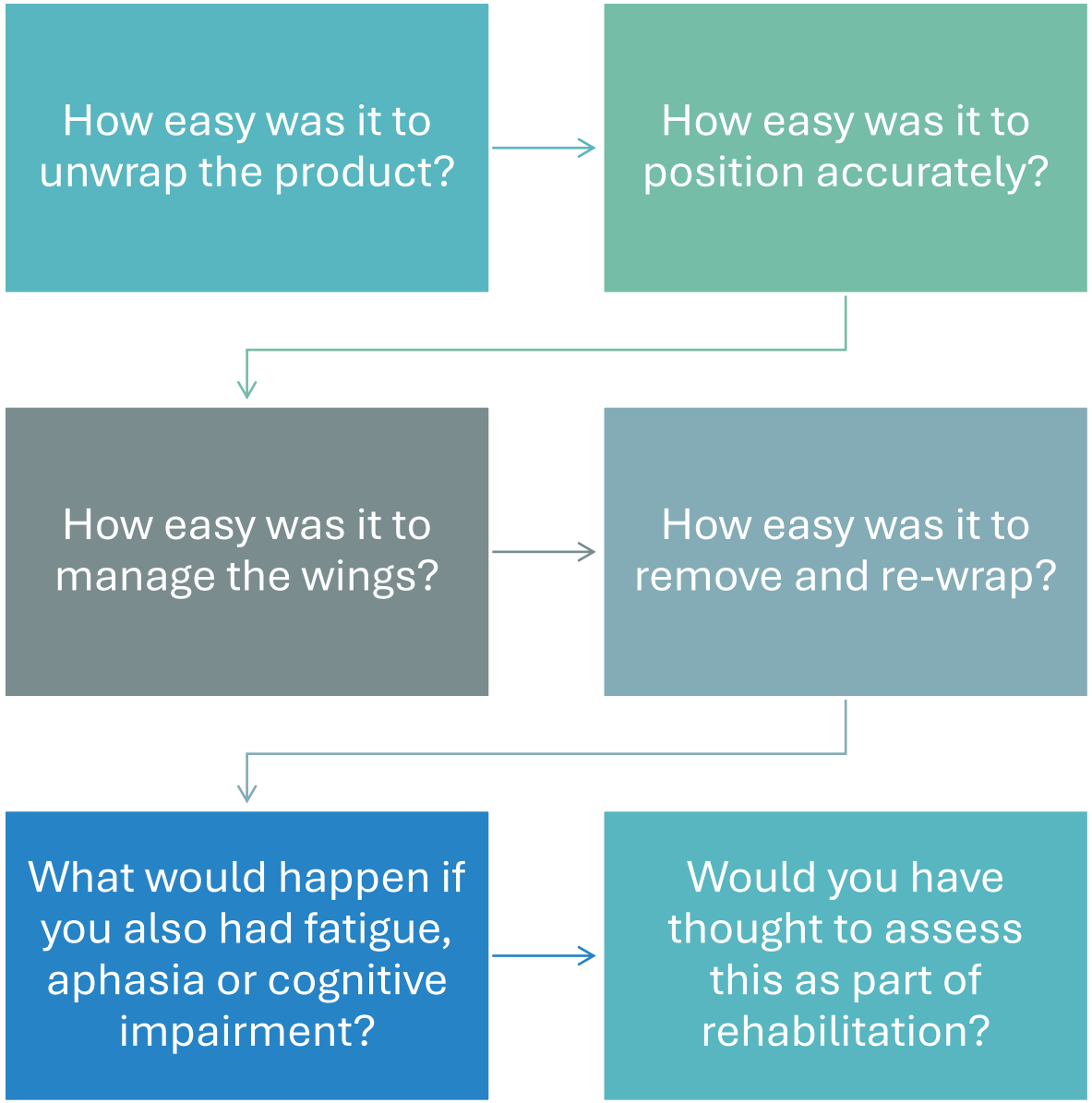
Do we know WHY someone is taking the pill before we stop it?

- Heavy menstrual bleeding
- Painful periods
- Endometriosis
- PCOS
- Acne
- PreMenstrual Dysphoric Disorder
- Hormonal cycle regulation
- Prevent pregnancy

Practical exercise

- Use non-dominant hand
- Put it on, stick the wings on
- Then take it off and wrap it up.

Reflections



What can we do tomorrow?

Ask

Have your periods or hormonal health changed since your stroke?

Acknowledge

Make it okay to talk about.

Signpost

Who can help? Use your MDT

Women aren't asking for specialist treatment.

Most were asking for information, acknowledgement and someone who felt comfortable having the conversation.

Resources

- Women and stroke | Stroke Association
- Women's Toolkit | HER BRAIN
- Women and blood clots | Thrombosis UK

References

- Stroke in Women: A Review Focused on Epidemiology, Risk Factors, and Outcomes J Stroke. 2023;25(1):2-15. Published online January 31, 2023 **https://doi.org/10.5853/jos.2022.03468**
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- Samuelson Bannow B. Management of heavy menstrual bleeding on anticoagulation. Hematology Am Soc Hematol Educ Program. 2020 Dec 4;2020(1):533-537. doi: 10.1182/hematology.2020000138. PMID: 33275699; PMCID: PMC7727540.