

Returning to work for
stroke survivors:
management of work-
related fatigue and
anxiety.

a stroke / of luck

By Tahmida and Tahiyah

Introduction

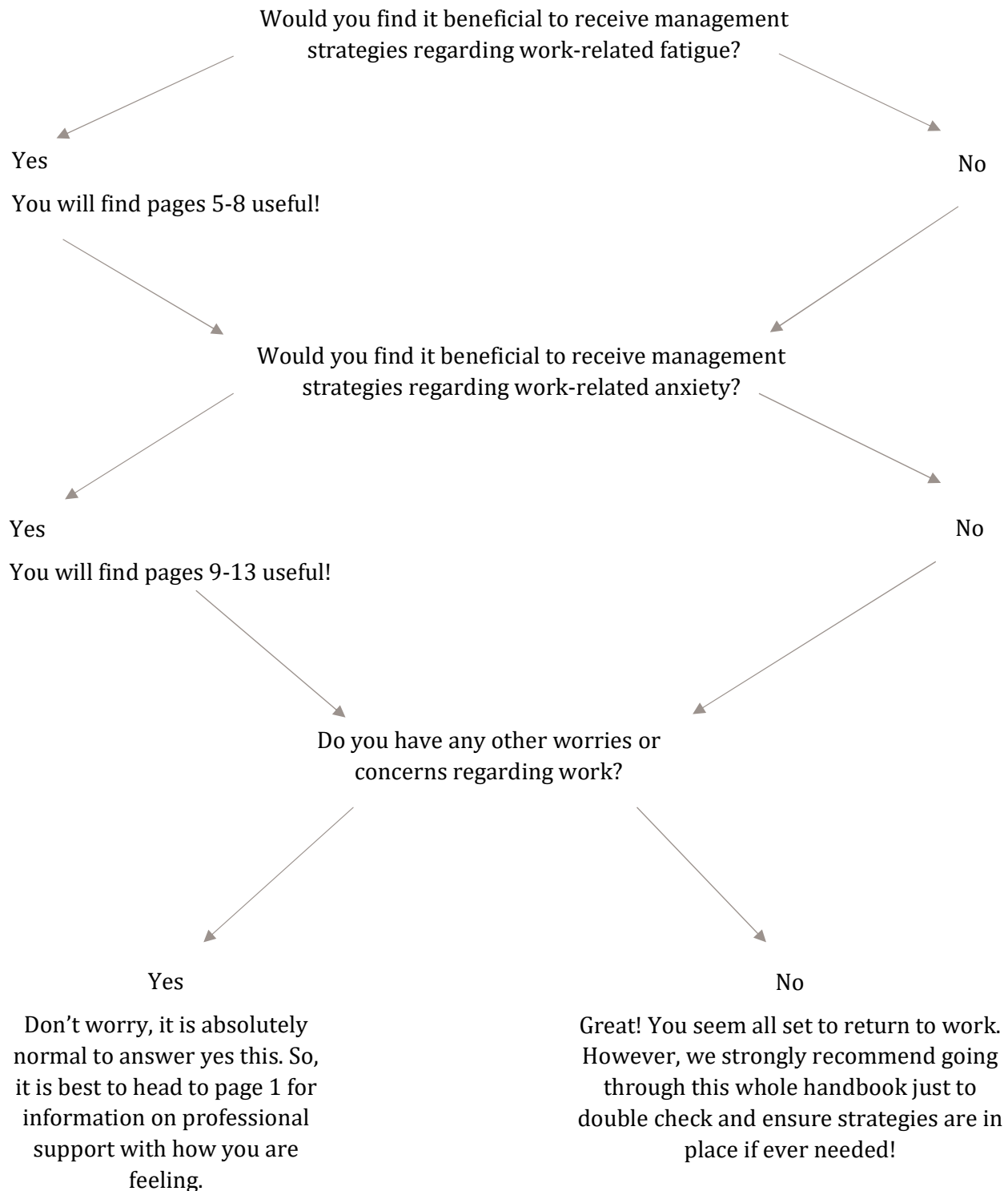
This handbook will be useful for those who have returned to work/are ready to return to work and are wanting some guidance with their physical and mental preparation. Please note if you are feeling overwhelmed during any stage of this handbook please stop, store it in a safe place and return when you feel completely ready!

Contents Page

Return-to-work journey flowchart	2
Traffic light model	3
Create your own traffic light model	4
Fatigue management strategies	5-7
Fatigue diary template	8
Anxiety management strategies	9-11
Journaling your emotions template	12-13
Helpful contact information for professional support	14
Reference list	15

Your return-to-work journey flowchart

Note for reader: If you are wanting to skip to a specific part of the handbook, please follow the arrows and find which section is relevant to you and which pages you will likely find most useful!



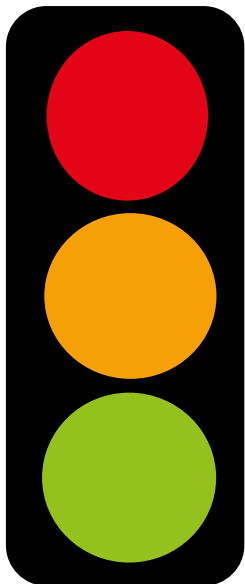
Traffic Light Model

We will be incorporating this model from the stroke of luck, within the two elements of this handbook and therefore have provided a brief description of this model below:

If you have suffered from a stroke, you may find this model useful! We understand how frustrating and overwhelming it can be with the uncertainty and sudden onset of certain symptoms. This model allows you to recognise your warning signs before running out of energy.

This model is relevant to this handbook as it can help you learn more about managing your anxiety and fatigue via this traffic light system: Red, Amber, and Green.

Find below an example of the traffic light model completed by Craig Pankhurst (stroke survivor and CEO of stroke of luck):



RED: Depleted Functionality.

Example: In 'Red Zone', I become very limited in my movement and struggle to communicate effectively.

AMBER: Low Functionality.

Example: When in my 'Amber Zone', my speech and thought processes slow down and my left side weakness is intensified.

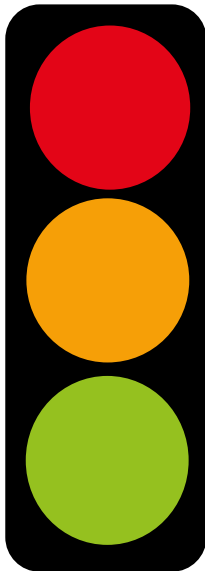
GREEN: High Functionality.

Example: When I'm in my 'Green Zone' I'm able to function pretty much as I could pre-stroke, but with slight left-side weakness and less concentration.

For more information regarding the traffic light model, please visit the stroke of luck website and watch the readily released videos explaining the model in more depth! <https://www.astrokeofluck.co.uk/stroke-resources/>

Create your own traffic light model

Now that you have gained the relevant knowledge regarding the model, please test your knowledge, and apply the following example to you, your symptoms, and your journey.



Please fill in the blanks of the template below:

RED: Depleted amount of energy and ability. For example: When I'm in my 'Red Zone', I.....

.....

AMBER: Low amount of energy and ability. For example: When I'm in my 'Amber Zone',

.....

GREEN: High amount of energy and ability. For example: When I'm in my 'Green Zone'

.....

Congratulations! You now have the ability to recognise your warning signs within each of the categories of the traffic light model. You have also been able to group these signs to their level of impact on your energy and ability. Please keep these signs in mind as you continue on in the handbook!

Need help managing your work-related fatigue post-stroke? These pages (5-8) are for you!

What is fatigue?

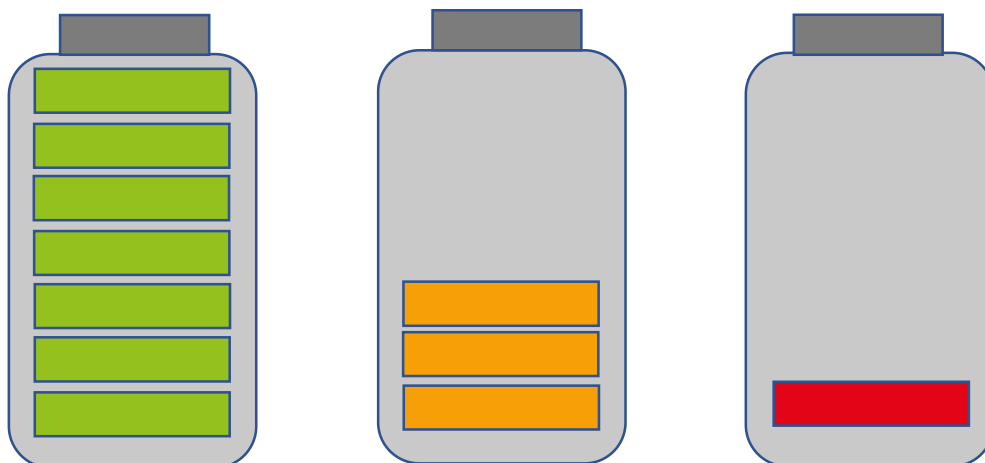
Fatigue is one of the common effects of stroke. It is different from normal tiredness and does not seem to improve with rest. It can also have an impact on a person's ability to complete the activities that are important to them.

The signs of fatigue differ from person to person, and it can be frustrating and upsetting because it is not always understood by friends, family, and colleagues.

Fatigue can occur after any type of stroke, and it is possible to experience severe fatigue after a relatively minor stroke. Even if you have fully recovered physically or if your stroke was a long time ago, fatigue can still be a problem.

To begin the management strategy, please imagine that all your energy is stored in a battery. The battery only has a limited amount of charge before it runs out. This means that you have a limited amount of energy to complete all the tasks that you want to do.

Below is a visual example, imagine each block of colour represents a block of energy. As demonstrated below, when you go from your green zone to your red zone (refer to page 3-4), these blocks begin to run out which means your energy is running out!



Fatigue management strategies

There are numerous methods to recharge/maintain your energy in your battery to avoid entering your RED zone. Here are a few strategies^{8,9,10,11} explained below:

Please note: These strategies may be difficult to implement if you are in your AMBER/RED zone. We suggest you begin practicing these strategies when in your GREEN, because you will likely struggle to implement some of the strategies when you're in AMBER/RED zones (this is normal!).

1) Prioritising activities in advance

- Prioritise your activities by completing all the essential activities when you feel least fatigued.
- If you only have a limited amount of energy throughout the day, prioritise the activities that are most important to you. Do this by making a list of the activities you want to do and select the ones that are most important (ensure to also include enjoyable and relaxing activities).

2) Pacing your day

- Try to balance your activities by spreading out tasks throughout the day or week, and break tasks down into manageable stages. For example, you may decide to vacuum one room today, and another room on another day.
- Remember that you may need to ask for assistance with some tasks, which is perfectly fine, listen to your body and understand your limits. It is recommended to take planned frequent breaks rather than one long break.
- Try to engage in as many relaxation techniques (found on page 10) to maximise your energy.

3) Sleep hygiene

- Feel more alert by having a sleeping routine (going to bed and waking up at the same time every day).
- Avoid using electronic devices in bed, instead engage with the relaxation techniques (found on page 10).
- Reduce caffeine, nicotine consumption and avoid eating heavy meals late in the evening.

4) Environmental modification and staying organised!

- Organise your workspace, such as your kitchen or office, to keep it as clutter-free as possible.
- Keep things in the same place so you don't have to waste energy looking for them. Use labels or signs to make it easier to find things.
- Use energy-saving techniques such as sliding rather than lifting items, sitting rather than standing while performing a task, and keeping items used frequently within easy reach.

5) Concentration strategies: maintain the mental energy in your battery!

- Using a 'to-do' list to help you stay on track, write down appointments, important events, and keeping track of work-related tasks. Use a diary or a calendar to schedule your time.
- Using alarms, alerts or written notes and 'post-its' as reminders rather than attempting to remember something.
 - Try to do one thing at a time to help your concentration.

Fatigue diary template

Keep a fatigue diary to keep track of how much activity you do each day. This will help you remember your progress over time, as well as understand how much activity you can handle and what triggers your fatigue. This will be useful in identifying when you are about to enter your amber and red zones.

Fatigue diary template (please fill in the template below), an **example** has been demonstrated in the first row.

Instructions:

- 1) Write down some of your daily tasks and the time they are done in the first two columns (tasks can include anything that is in your daily routine, some examples include changing clothes, cooking dinner, tidying bed, driving etc).
- 2) Give every task a priority score from 1-5 (1 being the least important, 5 being the most important).
- 3) Give every task a fatigue score from 1- 5 (1 uses the least energy, 5 uses the most energy).
- 4) Give every task a traffic light colour (which zone you felt you were in after completing the task):

Green = High amount of energy and ability.

Amber= Low amount of energy and ability.

Red= Depleted (extremely low) energy and ability.

Day: Monday

Time	Activities/Tasks	Priority	Fatigue score	Traffic light zone
<i>8:00</i>	<i>Brushing teeth</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>Green</i>

Need help managing your work-related anxiety post-stroke? These pages (9-12) are for you!

This management strategy has been broken down into 4 main steps (each with a tick box to allow you to complete a step and come back to the next when you are able).

Note: These steps can be completed within days, week, months, or even years, it is all about your capabilities and your rehabilitation journey so please do not allow yourself to become overwhelmed with completing this strategy!

Self-management 4-step-strategy for work-related anxiety post-stroke



Step 1: Acceptance

Firstly, what is anxiety? Anxiety is a constant feeling of unease, like a worry or fear that can be mild or severe.⁵

The initial step of managing anxiety is acceptance, which is allowing difficult emotions to be present, without fighting them or pushing them away.

Anxiety is a common emotional effect of stroke. In fact, most patients experience some feelings of worry after their stroke. Therefore, accept this feeling as a common symptom and try not to allow it to overwhelm you!



Step 2: Mindfulness

‘A mental state that can be achieved by focusing on the present moment’

How to reach this state: There are two ways in which this can be achieved: breathing and muscle relaxation techniques.⁶

Two ways to achieve mindfulness (pick the one you prefer or both!)

2a) Mindfulness using breathing techniques:

This technique can be used to help focus on the present moment and reduces the ability for thoughts and worries to sneak in.

2b) Mindfulness using progressive muscle relaxation

This technique increases your awareness of your body and reduces muscle tension and feelings of distress.

How to make breathing your core focus point:

- 1) Close both your eyes.
- 2) Breathe in slowly.
- 3) Picture the air entering through your nose.
- 4) Picture the air filling your lungs.
And the opening of your abdomen.
- 5) Breathe out slowly.
- 6) Picture the air flowing out of your lungs and then nose or mouth.

Repeat this process until an awareness of your breathing and senses has built up.

Ask yourself: What sounds do

How to relax your muscles progressively:

- 1) Begin at the feet by curling your toes and hold for a few seconds, then relax.
- 2) Bend the ankles upward and then hold them for a few seconds, then relax.
- 3) Continue to do this with the rest of your body, move up each time until you reach your head.

When you are finished, your body awareness will have increased, and your muscles will be relaxed.



Step 3: Exercise

Plan a consistent and regular time to exercise each week. Exercise is known to release endorphins, which are chemicals in our brain that helps improve your anxiety and overall mood post-stroke. The form of exercise can be chosen by yourself, to make it more personal and exciting.⁹

Exercising has also been shown to improve executive functioning and memory skills, both of which are important when returning to work, and thus will directly reduce your feelings of work-related anxiety.¹⁰



Step 4: Journaling

Journaling is a process that involves writing down your thoughts and what you are stressed or anxious about. The main purpose is for you to gain a deeper understanding of your anxiety and potential triggers. This will then allow you to start avoiding your triggers and reducing your anxiety.

Even just the act of writing down your anxious thoughts and feelings can be extremely beneficial. Keeping negative feelings bottled up can cause anxiety to get worse. So, by writing them all down, they are removed from your mind, leaving you feeling calmer.¹¹

Journaling your emotions template

Please fill in the empty journal table at the bottom of this page (document how you are feeling throughout your day by putting an 'X' in the box, as well as what has triggered the feeling)
 An **example** has been demonstrated below.
 Please find a blank template on page 13.

After completing the template over a period of time, you will find patterns of improvements and consistent feelings. You may find elements in which you need some further assistance with. If so, turn to page 14 for helpful contact information!

Time of day	Happy	Excited	Sad	Angry	Worried	Anxious	Scared	Other (state which feeling)	Description of experience/ any event that caused feeling
Morning 6am-12pm	X					X		Lonely	Happy: I visited my mums house and saw my younger brother after a long time, and it made me happy the moment I saw him. Anxious: There were a lot of people in my house, and I got anxious about what they'd think about me after all this time. Lonely: I went back home, and it was really quiet, and I felt lonely.

Time of day	Happy	Excited	Sad	Angry	Worried	Anxious	Scared	Other feelings	Description of experience/ any event that caused feeling
Morning 6am-12pm									
Afternoon 12pm-4pm									
Evening 4pm-9pm									
Night 9am-6am									

Helpful contact information for professional support

For all health-related advice: Call your local NHS and GP services (including allied health professionals).

For international mental health-related advice:

1) United for Global Mental Health

Contact email: media@unitedgmh.org

Website: <https://unitedgmh.org/mental-health-support>

For UK-based mental health services:

1) Samaritans:

Contact number: 116123

Website: <http://www.samaritans.org.uk>

2) MIND:

Contact number: 0300 1233393

Website: <http://www.mind.org.uk/information-support>

Final note to reader:

We hope that you have found these management strategies helpful towards your fatigue and anxiety and that you now feel more prepared tackling the workplace! Feel free to implement these strategies prior to work, during work and also during other parts of your daily routine.

Please do not take any risks or engage in any of these strategies if your GP services/health professionals have advised against it. All strategies suggested are evidence-based however may not be relevant, safe, or beneficial for every survivor's unique rehabilitation journey.

Please provide us with your feedback for this handbook!

Follow this link:

https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSddW1FwmVAU9MvrZilluYwHS9E1D1KV6tXfNGo3jrOJ6f8yvw/viewform?usp=sf_link

It should take you directly to complete a short evaluation form. Please answer the questions and remember to click submit at the bottom of the page and we will receive your answers automatically. Please note: each form will be received anonymously and will not be received with names or any personal information.

Reference list

- 1) Clarke, A., Barker-Collo, S.L and Feigin, V.L. (2012) Poststroke fatigue: does group education make a difference? A randomized pilot trial. *Topics in stroke rehabilitation* 19(1), 32–39.
- 2) Sadeghniaat-Haghighi, K., and Yazdi, Z. (2015). Fatigue management in the workplace. *Industrial psychiatry journal* 24(1), 12–17.
- 3) Stroke association (2021) *Fatigue and Tiredness*. <https://www.stroke.org.uk/effects-of-stroke/tiredness-and-fatigue#:~:text=You%20may%20not%20feel%20able,socialise%20and%20enjoy%20everyday%20activities>. Accessed 9 March 2022.
- 4) Wheatcroft, J. and Malley, D. (2020) *Managing fatigue after brain injury*. Nottingham: Headway.
- 5) Craske, M. G. and Stein, M. B. (2016) Anxiety. *The Lancet* 388(10063), 3048-3059.
- 6) Wrapson, W., Dorrestein, M., Wrapson, J., Theadom, A., Kayes, N., Snell, D., Rutherford, S., Roche, M., Babbage, D. R., & Siegert, R. J. (2021). Stroke survivors' expectations and post-intervention perceptions of mindfulness training: A qualitative study. *Neuropsychological Rehabilitation*, 1-23.
- 7) Wrapson, W., Dorrestein, M., Wrapson, J., Theadom, A., Kayes, N. M., Snell, D. L., Rutherford, S., Roche, M., Babbage, D. R., Taylor, S., & Siegert, R. J. (2021). A feasibility study of a one-to-one mindfulness-based intervention for improving mood in stroke survivors. *Mindfulness*, 12(5), 1148-1158.
- 8) Han, A. (2021). Mindfulness- and acceptance-based interventions for stroke survivors: A systematic review and meta-analysis. *Rehabilitation Counseling Bulletin*, 3435522110432.
- 9) Hildebrand, M. W. (2015). Effectiveness of interventions for adults with psychological or emotional impairment after stroke: An evidence-based review. *The American Journal of Occupational Therapy*, 69(1), 6901180050p1-6901180050p9.
- 10) Rand, D., Eng, J. J., Liu-Ambrose, T., & Tawashy, A. E. (2010). Feasibility of a 6-month exercise and recreation program to improve executive functioning and memory in individuals with chronic stroke. *Neurorehabilitation and Neural Repair*, 24(8), 722-729.
- 11) Hayman, B., Wilkes, L., & Jackson, D. (2012). Journaling: Identification of challenges and reflection on strategies. *Nurse Researcher*, 19(3), 27-31.

Copy right note: all information taken from external sources have been numbered and referenced accordingly.

Co-authors of this handbook: Tahiyah Begum

Occupational Therapy Student
University of Bradford

Tahmida Ali

Occupational Therapy Student
University of Bradford

Working alongside the Stroke of Luck organisation