

How to heal your mind, body and spirit – a stroke survivor’s perspective

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Description:

In 2017, I suffered an extremely rare hemorrhagic stroke that completely changed my life. I had to undergo two brain surgeries, spent a month in a medically induced coma and I have been rehabbing ever since. I had a rare congenital cerebral vascular abnormality (cavernoma) that affects a ridiculously small population in the USA. According to the Handbook of Neurosurgery by Dr. Mark S. Greenberg, this abnormality develops in about 3,300 to 58,800 people in the United States. And even rarer are the chances of it developing in a hemorrhage - only about 86-1,730 people per year in the USA, many of whom die in the process. And I happened to be in this rare of the rarest category, to have a condition, to have it develop into a hemorrhage and to survive. And I am incredibly grateful to be in that survivor’s group.

I have tried many different therapies, both in Western and Eastern medicine, to help me heal my mind, body, and spirit. The left side of my body had become weak and I suffered from severe headaches, dizziness, balance issues and nystagmus. Luckily, my cognitive abilities were intact. I embarked on a strict rehab program which included Physical, Occupational, and Speech therapy sessions which gradually helped me regain some strength. Also, I was consumed by mental agony, and thoughts of ‘Why me?! So, against my comfort level, I started seeing a psychologist to see if that will help me. Being an analytical and data driven person, I had never thought much about such “touchy-feely” stuff and had discounted the need for it before my stroke. Over time, however, I developed trust with my psychologist, and it helped me to cope better. Some of the other things which helped me ‘accept’ my new normal were yoga techniques such as meditation, Pranayama, Bhramari, Om chanting and Shavasana. Growing up in India, I had never been that interested in traditional Indian wellness practices. But my desire to heal was so strong that I decided to give it a try, in addition to the various rehab therapies I was doing. My rationale was ‘I have nothing to lose’ by trying this. So, going by the same thought, besides rehab and yoga, I also indulged in other eastern wellness treatments, including several ayurvedic massage sessions as well as treatments like acupuncture and energy healing. I also did vision therapy to correct my nystagmus. Since my issues were severe, I also started vestibular therapy. Music was another important aspect that helped me calm down. I tried Raga therapy and listened to frequency-based healing music (Wholetones). Even though it may not have helped me directly with increasing my body strength or reducing my dizziness, it helped me reduce anxiety, and helped me sleep better. I also tried CBD Oil (Cannabidiol) that is legalized in the USA and is said to have healing properties. I started taking 3-4 drops daily to see if that would help me. I believe it did work for me some in other aspects, but it did not help me in curing my issues, and so, after a couple of months, I stopped it. I also tried taking nerve shots on my forehead for my headaches. That did not work either. I was so desperate for the dizziness to go away that I even tried drinking a regular glass of beer, for

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Received date: November 09, 2020

Accepted date: November 23, 2020

Published date: November 30, 2020

relief. I thought maybe having some alcohol would have a reverse effect. But it did not. Before my stroke, I would have a glass of wine a couple of times in a week. After my stroke, however, my doctors had discouraged me from consuming any alcohol, as the first thing it does is affect the brain.

Apart from specific treatments, the holistic approach to health and life itself left a lasting influence on me. I can honestly say today that it is not just one treatment that was instrumental in my healing, but a combination of them all, coupled with my desire to heal myself. All these therapies enabled me to be who I am today – from being bed-ridden, to moving into a wheelchair, to a walker and now finally, walking with a cane. As I continue my healing journey, I am set to explore Botox and Biofeedback treatments as the next steps, to see if they will help me.

What I have learned over the past 3.5 years?

- There are no magic pills or potions, in Western or Eastern medicine, which offers a total cure. You need to explore both, but take a balanced approach to it, without overdoing it.
- You cannot play the victim beyond a certain time. It is okay to pity yourself initially but that must stop quickly so you can slowly accept your new reality.
- Do not be tempted to compare your recovery with others. Remember that every situation is different. Learn to accept that you would heal at your own pace and that is perfectly okay.
- Take ownership of your decisions – there are many suggestions that you will receive from various people who mean well. But only you can determine if you can participate in certain activities or chores or treatments.
- One's healing is enhanced when people from different backgrounds gather to help., offering the most diverse and complementary healing environment
- It is hard to accept schadenfreude in others, especially in those you don't expect it from. Don't take it personally, its human nature.
- Learn to balance independence in your recovery (being self-reliant and accepting care from others). You need both.
- If you see 'fatigue' among family and friends, related to their involvement in your care or interaction, do not take it personally. No one, including the person closest to you, can

always be there 100%

To make life easier, learn to use more technologies such as:

Speech recognition software while typing on a computer

Skype or WhatsApp for remote assistance and communication

Use of larger fonts on the computer.