



Edited by **Cherrill Hicks**

# Surviving a stroke

There are thousands of people left disabled by stroke every year. Meet one man who fought his way back to health

**B**y his own admission, David Hinds used to live life in the fast lane. Twice divorced, he smoked 80 cigarettes a day, drank like a fish, loved fast cars and nightclubs and enjoyed fabulous holidays.

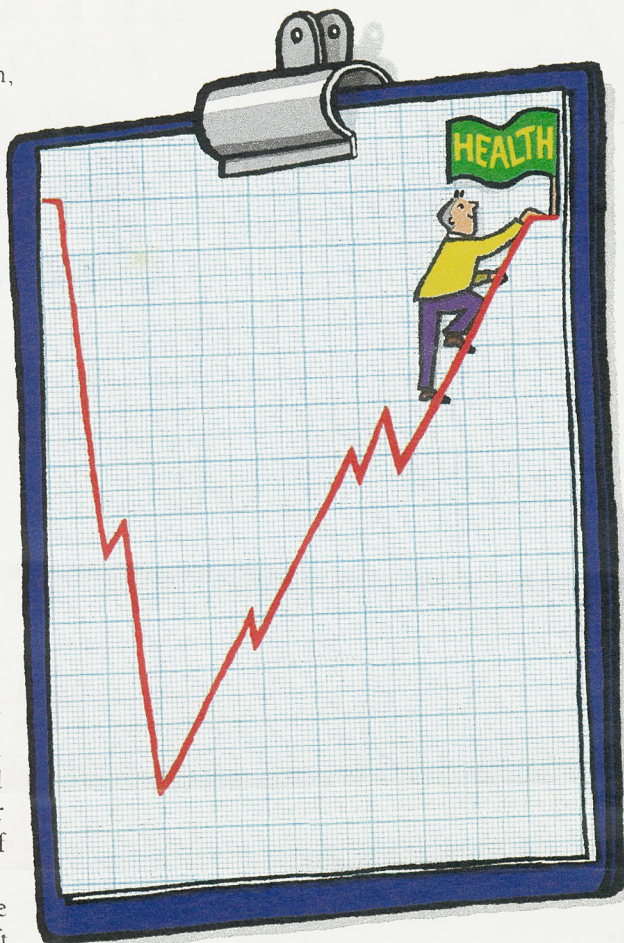
With a high-powered career in a stress management consultancy, he was, he says "definitely a type-A personality – power-crazy and ambitious." By any standards, he was highly successful, with a 15-bedroom house and a jet-set lifestyle to match.

But in August 1995, when he was 50, David suffered two strokes within a few days of each other. Paralysed on his right side, he could no longer walk, speak or swallow properly. "One moment I was a healthy, powerful individual and the next, a semi-dependent babbling who couldn't even stop himself dribbling," he says.

David looked destined to join the estimated 35,000 people who are left seriously disabled by stroke every year. But remarkably, he has made a total recovery. Not only does he live independently, he has learned to both speak (he is very articulate) and to read again. "To look at me, you would never dream I had been so ill," he says. "I can do everything I used to do."

David is convinced that thousands of those who have been damaged by strokes could also reclaim their health. The only thing it takes, he believes, is willpower. "Of course, there are a minority who do not have the capacity to recover fully," he concedes. "But there are so many others who could. However, it takes a huge commitment."

David has written a powerful, reassuring book about the experience of having a stroke, published this month. It contains a wealth of practical advice but also focuses on the emotional impact – the grieving which stroke patients have to go through for the loss of their faculties and their former life. The stages of the "grief reaction" include shock, denial, anger, guilt,



Oxford for several months. In danger of a third stroke, he underwent surgery to bypass the narrowing of a major artery. He says that good medical assessment and care – preferably in a specialist stroke unit – is vital. "A lot of people end up on a general ward where they have little specialist care or support."

**D**ischarged from hospital, David was shipped to his niece's home in Cornwall where, with painstaking effort, he learned to read again – with one of his nephew's favourite books, *Thomas The Tank Engine*.

Like others in his predicament, David suffered from what he calls "stroke rage", when

depression, acceptance and then adjustment. The pity, says David, is that at present, too few patients reach the final stage – wellbeing.

A stroke occurs when the blood supply to the brain is disrupted, either by a clot blocking an artery or by bleeding within and around the brain. In minutes, this results in irretrievable

damage to brain cells. To get around the damage, it is possible to retrain undamaged brain cells to take on new roles – such as controlling muscle movements to facilitate walking.

The first few days, weeks and months are crucial, as undamaged cells start to mimic the actions of those that have died. "It is vital that you do as much as you can yourself," says David.

From his hospital bed, he closed his business and sold his house. It is vital for the stroke patient to focus on getting well, he believes, and not be

distracted by other problems.

David was lucky: after his second stroke, he ended up in the specialist unit at the John Radcliffe Hospital in

feelings of misery and hopelessness take over. And, like 50 per cent of stroke patients, he also went through a severe depression, becoming, he says "an inconsolable wreck" until he realised he needed help. His message is that, although depression is frightening, it is never permanent and that the anti-depressant, Prozac, has a useful role for stroke patients. A sense of humour is also vital, he says.

Nowadays, David lives simply in a small flat in Polperro, Cornwall and says he is happier than ever. He is also a changed man: more gentle and more considerate of others. He has neither the energy nor the desire to return to his old business: his chief interest now is his writing.

"The only reminder of the fact that I once had a stroke is that I cannot get through the day without a rest – I get exhausted easily."

Ironically, his "Type A" personality may have helped his recovery. "I guess I'm awkward, difficult and bloody minded," he says. "But what really decided me was when I looked in the mirror and saw that one side of my mouth was higher than the other. I knew I couldn't live like that – that I would have to get better."

After *Stroke* by David M Hinds, Thorsons, £9.99 pb.

The Stroke Association helpline 0845 303 3100 (local rate).



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