

## 4.5 Sensation

There are many considerations that are crucial to promoting safety and optimizing recovery when working with people who have had a stroke. The TACLS Quick Reference Guides were developed from the TACLS resource and can be used as quick reference to help *support healthcare providers* and informal caregivers who may not typically work with and care for people who have had a stroke.

We recommend reviewing the full **TACLS resource** for more complete information:  
[strokebestpractices.ca/resources/professional-resources/tacsl](http://strokebestpractices.ca/resources/professional-resources/tacsl)

### Quick reference guide highlights

- **Always follow the current care plan for the person that you are working with.**
- Stroke can impair the area in the brain where the sensory input is received and interpreted.
- A person who has had a stroke may have limited or no sensation in parts of the body affected by stroke.
- The person may lose the ability to feel sensations of touch and/or experience hypersensitivity, have altered pain or temperature sensation and/or lack awareness of their affected arm/leg and its position in space.
- A person may also experience numbness, pins and needles, tingling and/or be very hypersensitive to touch in different parts of the body.
- Impaired sensation can affect personal safety. It can affect the ability to carry out daily activities, impact quality of movement and increase risk for burns, cuts, blisters, falls and/or injury. It is very important to take steps to support safety during personal care and day-to-day activities.
- Follow any recommendation made by the occupational therapist or physiotherapist to increase a person's safety and awareness of sensory loss.

### Touch and hypersensitivity

- A person may lose the ability to feel light touch or deep pressure or be hypersensitive.
- A person may be unable to feel something touching their body and/or skin like a blanket or clothing or have difficulty moving objects in their hands, like a button on a shirt. This can lead to blisters or pressure injury if, for example, the person is unable to feel that a shoe is too tight or if the person is sitting and/or lying too long in one position.
- If experiencing hypersensitivity, a person might describe pins and needles, a sharp twinge or pain when they touch something or when they are being touched during personal care.

### Temperature

- A person who has had a stroke may have difficulty feeling the difference between hot and cold or be unable to recognize the temperature they are feeling.

- Help the person reduce risks of injury in their daily activities (e.g., remind the person to check water temperature with their unaffected hand, or make sure to keep the affected side away from a hot stove element or oven while preparing a meal).

## Joint position

- A person may lose the ability to sense the position of where their joints and limbs are in space and cannot tell where their body parts are without looking at them.
- For example, the person may leave a leg behind during a transfer, not swing their leg while walking, not grasp their walker properly, or not realize their arm is hanging over the side of the wheelchair.
- Provide verbal cues and touch the affected limb when providing care to remind the person of what is happening on affected side e.g., say “your right arm has fallen off of your wheelchair” while touching that arm.
- Monitor and ensure proper positioning of the affected side.

**Note:** This information represents some of the priorities of care relating to changes in sensation; consult with the stroke care team for any questions or concerns.

### References:

1. Canadian Stroke Best Practice Recommendations: [www.strokebestpractices.ca](http://www.strokebestpractices.ca), **Rehabilitation and Recovery following Stroke**, 6<sup>th</sup> Edition, Sections 5.3 and 6.3
2. Taking Action for Optimal Community and Long-Term Stroke Care (TACLS) – **Sensation**

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