

## 4.2 Unilateral Spatial Neglect

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](https://strokebestpractices.ca/resources/professional-resources/tacsl)

### Quick reference guide highlights

- **Always follow the current care plan for the person that you are working with.**
- All persons with stroke should be screened for visual, visual motor and visual perceptual deficits as a routine part of the broader rehabilitation assessment process.
- After a stroke, a person may experience unilateral spatial neglect, where the person may show a lack of awareness of their affected side and lack the ability to pay attention to their surroundings. The person cannot perceive or process stimuli on the affected side of the body or environment.
- Treatment approaches for unilateral spatial neglect include strategies to increase awareness of the affected side (e.g., visual scanning, verbal and sensory cueing, frequent reminders to use affected limbs and education).
- In more persistent situations, use of compensatory strategies (e.g., placing objects on non-affected side so they will be noticed) may be necessary.
- **Personal neglect** occurs when a person has neglect of one side of the body (body parts). The person may be observed to only perform self-care and/or hygiene on one side of the body, leave the affected limb dangling, and/or keep their head turned away from the neglected side.
- A person with **near extrapersonal neglect** will be inattentive to space within reaching distance. The person may be observed to only eat half the food on a plate, have difficulty finding objects placed on one side of a table, closet, drawer etc., and/or have difficulty reading as they only attend to words on one half of the page or of a sentence.
- A person with **far extrapersonal neglect** will be inattentive to space beyond reaching distance. The person may be observed bumping into objects on the affected side, being unaware of someone approaching on the neglected side, and/or reading only half of a sign resulting in possible misinterpretation of what the sign says.



### How you can help

- You can help the person stay safe by helping to increase awareness of their affected side and the surrounding area, and working through neglect concerns during your daily care and interactions.
- Talk with the occupational therapist about how to best reinforce use of the neglected side in daily activities.

- Position or help the person position the affected limb so that they can see it.
- Encourage use of affected arm and hand during daily activities if the person has movement in the extremity. Use hand over hand guidance if needed.
- Talk to the person on the neglected side and use cues to draw attention to the affected side.
- Have the person use a mirror to provide feedback when dressing or grooming.
- Follow the occupational therapist's recommendations for helping the person increase their attention to the neglected side and/or compensate for unilateral spatial neglect. This may include:
  - Practice scanning to the affected side to locate items within near or far space when carrying out daily activities.
  - If improvement is limited, you may need to place frequently used items on the person's unaffected side, so they are easy to find.
- Always use the same technique and order for dressing, starting with the neglected side.
- Practice taking the same route to a place every time, so the person becomes familiar with the route.
- Place your hand on top of their neglected limb or gently rub the limb to offer sensory feedback to help them notice the affected body part.

**Note:** This information represents some of the priorities of care related to unilateral spatial neglect; consult the occupational therapist and stroke care team for any questions or concerns regarding unilateral spatial neglect.

#### References:

1. Canadian Stroke Best Practice Recommendations: [www.strokebestpractices.ca](http://www.strokebestpractices.ca), **Rehabilitation and Recovery following Stroke**, 6<sup>th</sup> Edition, Section 8
2. Taking Action for Optimal Community and Long-Term Stroke Care (TACLS) – **Unilateral Spatial Neglect**

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