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**Thursday 5 December 2019**

**Co. Antrim stroke survivor calls on residents to find their festive spirit**

Opening presents is the favourite Christmas activity for people living across the UK, according to a new survey by the Stroke Association.(i)

The charity has found that the favourite activities at Christmas time also include decorating the tree (45%), cooking Christmas dinner (41%) and playing with the kids/grandkids (33%).

Yet many of the UK’s 1.2 million stroke survivors are no longer able to enjoy these and many other Christmas pleasures.(ii)

For well over a third of stroke survivors (39%), the effects of their stroke will mean that this Christmas they will be unable to play with the kids or grandkids, decorate the tree, and cook or help to cook the Christmas dinner.

One in five stroke survivors won’t even be able to wish their friends and loved ones a “Merry Christmas” due to problems with their communication.

Stephen Totten from Cushendun Co. Antrim, 43, is husband to wife Nola and dad to their three kids Keeley, Odhran and Lara. Stephen had a stroke in June 2019, which left him with right sided weakness and a total loss of speech. Now six months on, Stephen still has reduced feeling on his right side although the movement in his arm and leg has recovered well. Stephen now attends a Stroke Association Communication Plus group in Magherafelt and his speech is improving all the time.

Stephen says: “This Christmas, I know that I can’t wrap presents or bring the Christmas tree and decorations down from the attic and I’ll be needing someone to help with the larger presents and putting any toys together. Every Christmas I would’ve always helped my wife Nola with the Christmas dinner, peeling all the potatoes and the carrots and this year I’ll not be able to do that.

“I am looking forward to Christmas though. I can’t wait to see the kids, and my wife's faces when opening their presents. I just love having the family altogether and enjoying quality family time. It reminds me what's important…still being able to enjoy these things with my loving family. I’m supporting the Stroke Association’s Christmas appeal and I’d like to encourage other people to get in the festive spirit and support the charity’s appeal so they can help more stroke survivors like me”.

Director of the Stroke Association in Northern Ireland, Barry Macaulay, said:

“Christmas is a special time to enjoy with family and friends, but for thousands of people in Northern Ireland like Stephen, stroke will have turned their lives upside down. That’s because stroke happens in the brain, the control centre of who we are and what we can do. The impact varies depending on which part of the brain is affected. It could be anything from wiping out your speech and physical abilities, to affecting your emotions and personality.

“In Northern Ireland the Stroke Association helps people to rebuild their lives after stroke, but we cannot do this without your support.

“This Christmas we want to highlight the challenges that stroke survivors face as they struggle to take part in the activities we cherish the most, from decorating the Christmas tree to cooking Christmas Dinner or playing with children and grandchildren.

“For those survivors whose stroke has left them with speech and communication difficulties, even the simple pleasure of wishing someone a Merry Christmas has been taken away.

“The Stroke Association supports more than 70,000 people as they rebuild their lives after stroke but we can’t do this alone. Donations to our Christmas Appeal can help more stroke survivors like Stephen to get the vital support they need to rebuild their lives. Please donate now at stroke.org.uk/gifts.”

To donate to the Stroke Association’s Christmas Appeal and help support stroke survivors to rebuild their lives visit stroke.org.uk/gifts

 **-Ends-**

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**Notes to editors:**

**About the Stroke Association**

* Stroke strikes every five minutes in the UK and it changes lives in an instant.
* The Stroke Association is a charity working across the UK to support people to rebuild their lives after stroke. We believe that everyone deserves to live the best life they can after stroke. From local support services and groups, to online information and support, anyone affected by stroke can visit stroke.org.uk or call our dedicated Stroke Helpline on 0303 3033 100 to find out about support available locally.
* Our specialist support, research and campaigning are only possible with the courage and determination of the stroke community and the generosity of our supporters. With more donations and support, we can help rebuild even more lives.
* You can follow us on [Twitter](https://twitter.com/TheStrokeAssoc), [Facebook](https://www.facebook.com/TheStrokeAssociation/) and [Instagram](https://www.instagram.com/thestrokeassociation/?hl=en).

**About the research**

(i)  Statistics based on a Good Relations survey of 2,002 members of the general public, conducted in November 2019.

(ii)  Statistics based on a 4Media Relations survey of 1,001 stroke survivors, conducted in August 2019.

**Table 1: The nation’s favourite Christmas activities revealed
[survey of 2,002 members of the general public](i)**

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  |  | Overall | Male | Female |
| 1 | Opening presents  | 58% | 50% | 65% |
| 2 | Wishing people Merry Christmas  | 47% | 40% | 53% |
| 3 | Decorating the tree  | 45% | 33% | 57% |
| 4 | Cooking or helping to cook the Christmas meal  | 41% | 38% | 44% |
| 5 | Wrapping presents  | 38% | 27% | 49% |
| 6 | Playing with your kids/grandkids  | 33% | 29% | 36% |
| 7 | Going for a Boxing Day walk  | 28% | 27% | 29% |
| 8 | Driving to visit family  | 25% | 25% | 24% |

**Table 2: Activities stroke survivors will not be able to take part in this Christmas [survey of 675 stroke survivors](ii)**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
|  | Total |
| Decorate the tree  | 39% |
| Cook or help cook the meal | 39% |
| Play with the kids/grandkids | 39% |
| Drive to visit family | 37% |
| Manage a Boxing Day walk | 34% |
| Wrap presents | 28% |
| Say Merry Christmas | 20% |