ENJOYING FOOD AGAIN

Paul Wood *reflects on his stroke, eating, drinking and swallowing needs, and recovery*

On 21 July 2025, I was walking home from the supermarket when all of a sudden, I felt a pain in the back of my head. I lost balance and fell to the ground and then started to lose the use of the left-hand side of my body. First my arm went, then my face and over the next few hours, I lost the use of my leg.

It was my son who called an ambulance. I was taken to Eastbourne A&E where I was seen by the triage nurse, doctor and then had a CAT scan. I was then diagnosed with having an ischaemic stoke and was admitted into acute stroke ward, Eastbourne Hospital.

My first knowledge of being on the ward was being fitted with a cannula, where fluids and medication was given to me. It wasn't until the second day of being in hospital that a post stroke diagnosis showed that I had also developed dysphagia. I was unable to eat or drink anything.

Enter Stef and Kayla, of the speech and language therapy team based in both Eastbourne and Bexhill. After a conversation with Stef, a plan was drawn up with the acute SLTs and dietitians. I was to have a nasogastric tube fitted to feed me while the hospital dealt with my stroke condition. I was transferred to Bexhill Irvine Unit for rehabilitation under Stef and Kayla, receiving five weeks of Ampcare, a medical device and therapy system designed to treat dysphagia.

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Arriving in Bexhill, I was still unable to swallow or drink. I was looking forward to my Ampcare treatment, hoping it was going to work. I was informed right from the start that it may be unsuccessful, and I might need to have a radiologically inserted gastrostomy (RIG) tube fitted as a more permanent way to feed me. Ampcare is an effective swallowing protocol (ESP) using a specialised form of neuromuscular electrical stimulation. They place two pads on each side of the throat, and with a brace under your chin they plug you into a small machine the size of a large mobile phone and pass an electrical current into the pads to stimulate the muscles. The machine itself has different levels of intensity starting at one, going up to level 20. I was signed up for 20 sessions.

After my Ampcare sessions, the results of a flexible endoscpoic evaluation of swallowing and a videofluoroscopy showed good news, I could eat and drink a regular diet and thin fluids. I was discharged from Bexhill on 2 October 2025, and now live a full and normal life. That's what happens when two angels who work for the NHS believe in helping people, they change lives.

PAUL WOOD, speech and language therapy service user, England