

ORGANIZATION NEWS

Information/Education Page

Guide to Living With Aphasia



After stroke and other injuries, people often have difficulty with communication. Aphasia—defined as difficulty with communication—affects about 1 million people in the United States. It may occur as a partial or total loss of the ability to talk, to understand what people say, and/or to read or write. For example, you may not be able to retrieve from your memory the names of particular objects or may not be able to put words together into sentences. More often, many aspects of communication are affected at the same time. People with aphasia still have the same level of intelligence that they did before the stroke; aphasia simply compromises their ability to find the words to express themselves and/or to understand what others are saying.

Types of Aphasia

There are several types of aphasia. They differ by where the brain is damaged.

- *Global aphasia* is the most severe form. People with global aphasia can speak a few familiar words, and may not understand what others say. They often cannot read or write.
- People with *Broca's, or nonfluent*, aphasia often leave out certain kinds of words from sentences, speak slowly and with effort, and/or have a hard time with grammar. They mainly speak short statements of less than 4 words, like “walk dog.” In its most severe form, people with Broca's aphasia can produce only a single word, often a 1-syllable utterance that may not be a word at all.
- People with *Wernicke's or fluent* aphasia talk easily. But they use the wrong sounds in words, say the wrong words, or even make up words.
- People with aphasia may also have difficulties finding the right words to identify objects or people, which is called “anomia.”

accomplished by you, or with the help of a communication partner: someone who knows you and can help you get your point across to others.

Communication tips:

- Use props to make conversation easier (photos, maps).
- Draw or write things down on paper.
- Take your time. Make phone calls or try talking to people only when you have plenty of time.
- Show people how to communicate with you; what methods work best for you (eg, pictures, writing, short sentences)?
- Stay calm. Focus on 1 idea at a time when talking.
- A rehabilitation professional—such as a speech language pathologist or occupational therapist—can help you to create a communication book that includes words, pictures, and symbols that are helpful to you.
- New technology, like tablets and personal computers, may have software that can help you express yourself.
- The Internet can be used to talk to people via e-mail or to create a personal Web page for yourself.

Aphasia Treatment and Communication Tips

You may recover from aphasia without treatment. Most people with aphasia, however, benefit from therapy by a speech language pathologist and/or occupational therapist. The goal is to improve your ability to communicate with other people. This is done by helping you regain some of your language skills and learning new ways of getting your message across when needed. The below tips may be helpful in assisting you with communicating. They can be

Resources for People With Aphasia

- The National Aphasia Association (www.aphasia.org) has tips sheets, information, links to community groups, and a network of state representatives that can help you find resources in your area.
- Get information on stroke recovery—including strategies to enhance recovery from aphasia—from the National Stroke Association. Visit www.stroke.org or call 1-800-STROKES (1-800-787-6537).

- Join an aphasia community group and/or stroke support group. Other survivors will understand your concerns, validate your issues, and offer encouragement and ideas for dealing with communication difficulties. Being in a support group may also encourage you to talk and communicate more, further helping your recovery.
- Speech language pathologists can also help with retraining of skills to improve your ability to communicate, such as word pronunciation. To find one in your area, visit the website of the American Speech and Hearing Association at (www.asha.org).

Other Professionals Who Can Help

- Neuropsychologists are specialists who can diagnose and treat changes in your thinking skills, memory, and behavior after stroke. Ask your psychiatrist or neurologist for a referral.
- Occupational therapists can help with retraining needed to improve communication, finding adaptive equipment to help you with expressing yourself, and/or modifying your environment to make communication easier. They can also teach you communication strategies to make it easier to get your point across to other people or to communicate what you need to in certain environments. To find one in your area, visit the website of the American Occupational Therapy Association at www.aota.org.

Disclaimer

This information is not meant to replace the advice from a medical professional. You should consult your health care provider regarding specific medical concerns or treatment.

Authorship



This card was developed by Stephen Page, PhD, MS, MOT, The Ohio State University, in collaboration with The National Stroke Association. Dr. Page may be reached at Stephen.Page@osumc.edu; the National Stroke Association can be reached at www.stroke.org.