

# Aphasia

*A guide for caregivers and patients*

## **For Caregivers**

### **What is aphasia?**

*Aphasia* is a language disorder. It affects a person's ability to speak, read, write, or understand words.

Each person's symptoms are different. Some have trouble understanding what people are saying. Others have trouble reading, or recalling how to say a word.

### **What causes aphasia?**

Aphasia can occur because of a brain tumor, head injury, stroke, or *neurodegenerative* (nervous system) disorder.

### **How do I communicate with someone who has aphasia?**

Aphasia can make a person feel alone. They may not be able to share their thoughts.

It can be hard for them understand what is being said to them. But, you can help by learning new ways to communicate. The acronym APHASIA tells how to communicate with someone who has aphasia.



*You may need to learn new ways to communicate when someone has aphasia.*

#### **A Ask simple, direct questions.**

A person with aphasia is just as smart as they were before. Try speaking in brief, simple sentences. This allows them to pause and make sure they understand. Remove unneeded parts of the story or question. Ask direct yes/no questions so that they can either a nod or give a "thumbs-up." This may make it easier for the person with aphasia to respond.

<b>P</b>	<p><b>Provide several ways for them to respond.</b></p> <p>You may already use hand gestures and facial expressions when you speak. This helps the other person understand what you are saying. Other ways to improve understanding include using pictures, pointing to key words, and using communication apps.</p>
<b>H</b>	<p><b>Help them communicate, if they ask for help.</b></p> <p>When someone with aphasia is speaking, there may be times when they have trouble recalling or saying a word. Your first reaction may be to jump in and help them. Wait to see if they ask for your help before you offer it.</p>
<b>A</b>	<p><b>Admit that you are both frustrated.</b></p> <p><b>Aphasia can be frustrating for</b> everyone. Instead of ignoring the issue, admit that you are both frustrated. This allows you to stop and take a break, which can help.</p>
<b>S</b>	<p><b>Speak directly to the person.</b></p> <p>People with aphasia may be left out of conversations. Other people may try to speak for them. When you speak directly to the person with aphasia, it gives them the chance to take part in the conversation.</p>
<b>I</b>	<p><b>If you don't understand, say so.</b></p> <p>If you really do not understand what the person with aphasia is saying, do not pretend that you do. Help them see that you want to understand what they are saying</p>
<b>A</b>	<p><b>Allow extra time.</b></p> <p>Conversations may take more time and need extra patience. It can be exhausting having a conversation when you have a communication disorder. Provide rest periods and try to have more complex conversations when the person has energy. Stress increases communication problems. Be sure to send clear signals with your body language that you are being patient.</p>



*Be patient with yourself and others.*

## **Is there treatment for aphasia?**

Some patients benefit from seeing a speech language pathologist. Others regain some language skills without treatment. It may take months or even years after an injury to recover from aphasia.

## **For Patients**

### **What is aphasia?**

*Aphasia* is a language disorder. It affects a person's ability to speak, read, write, or understand words.

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### **What causes aphasia?**

Aphasia can occur because of a brain tumor, head injury, stroke, or *neurodegenerative* (nervous system) disorder.

## **How do I communicate if I have aphasia?**

### **Take Your Time**

It may take longer than usual for you to get your words out or understand what someone is saying to you. Allow yourself extra time to process what is being said to you and to respond.

### **Let People Know What Works Best For You**

There are many ways for someone to communicate with you. They might use hand gestures, facial expressions, pictures, pointing to key words, or other methods. Let the person you're talking with know which method works well for you. Let people know if you need a question asked in a different way.

### **Eliminate Noise**

Lessen or eliminate background noise. Turn off the TV or radio. Move away from other people who are talking. Have conversations in places that are mostly quiet.

### **Use Assistive Devices**

Certain devices may help you communicate. These include pictures of words, diagrams, a pen and paper, or communication apps.

## **Admit When You Are Frustrated**

Aphasia can be frustrating for both sides. Admit that you are frustrated and take a break when needed.

## **If You Get Stuck**

If you get stuck, admit to the person you are speaking with that you are struggling. Review what you have already talked about. Decide if you can carry on the conversation or if it would be best to come back to it later.

## **Is there treatment for aphasia?**

Some patients benefit from seeing a speech language pathologist. Others regain some language skills without treatment. It may take months or even years after an injury to recover from aphasia.

## **Are there other resources?**

To learn more, visit [www.aphasia.org](http://www.aphasia.org).

*This handout was developed with information from [www.aphasia.org](http://www.aphasia.org).*

### **Questions?**

Your questions are important. Call your doctor or healthcare provider if you have questions or concerns.

#### **To talk with a nurse:**

Weekdays from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m., call 206.598.2282 and select option 2.

After hours and on weekends and holidays, call our Community Care Line at 206.598.3300.