

Aphasia (difficulty using language)

Speech and Language Therapy Patient Information Leaflet

Introduction

This leaflet is for people who have aphasia and their relatives/carers. It gives information on what this condition is and what can be done to help people who have it.

What is aphasia?

Aphasia is a condition that affects the brain and leads to problems using language correctly both in speech and writing.

People with aphasia make mistakes with the words they use, sometimes using the wrong sounds in a word, choosing the wrong word, or putting words together incorrectly. Many people with the condition find it difficult to understand words and sentences they hear or read.

Everyone with aphasia has different difficulties and abilities. Some people with aphasia might have little or no speech at all or only be able to say 'yes' and 'no'. These may or may not be used correctly. Some may find automatic speech easier, for example, counting and days of the week.

Other people with aphasia may use a lot of words, some of which may be jumbled or 'made up' words. They may have great difficulty getting their message across.

What causes it?

Aphasia is caused by damage to parts of the brain responsible for understanding and using language. Common causes include:

- stroke – thought to be the most common cause
- severe head injury
- brain tumour
- conditions that, over time, cause progressive brain and nervous system damage, such as dementia

How can I help my relative/friend?

To support their understanding:

- Ensure any glasses and/or hearing aids are in place
- Make sure you have their attention before speaking
- Face the person
- Reduce distractions by turning off the TV or radio
- Make sure only one person speaks at a time
- Slow down the rate of your speech to allow your relative/friend time to understand what has been said
- Use short, simple sentences
- Only ask one question at a time
- Allow plenty of time for a response
- Use gestures and/ or objects alongside words to help their understanding.
- Write down single key words about the main topics and significant people being spoken about

To support them to get their message across:

- Ask closed rather than open questions, for example, 'Do you want a cup of tea?' rather than 'What drink would you like?'.

- Ask questions that only need a yes or no answer.
- Offer the choice of only two items and encourage a selection, for example, a comb and a toothbrush.
- Encourage your relative/friend to:
 - point to relevant objects
 - use a simple gesture
 - use a facial expression to convey their feelings
 - nod and shake their head to indicate yes and no
 - use thumbs up or down
 - describe what the object looks like, if they can
- Be patient and give the person **time** to communicate.
- Think about having communication aids available for them to use such as grids containing words, letters and diagrams.
- Always use a pen and paper to supplement communication because this can ensure you are talking along the same lines and have not misunderstood each other.

It is likely that a combination of the above strategies will help communication and reduce frustration.

Be aware that the ability of your relative/friend to communicate effectively will probably decrease towards the end of the day. Tiredness and anxiety make communication more of an effort and more difficult.

It is helpful to build in plenty of breaks and to reduce frustration by responding to the content of what is said rather than the manner.

If you would like to discuss your relative's communication further, a speech and language therapist would be happy to do so. Please speak to the nurse in charge of your relative/friend or their GP to arrange this.

If you have any questions, or if there is anything you do not understand about this leaflet, please contact:

Speech and Language Therapy Department

Russells Hall Hospital
Pensnett Road, Dudley DY1 2HQ

01384 456111 ext. 2439 or ext. 4565

www.dudleygroup.nhs.uk

Email: Speechtherapy.adults@nhs.net

Russells Hall Hospital switchboard number: 01384 456111

This leaflet can be downloaded or printed from:

<http://dudleygroup.nhs.uk/services-and-wards/speech-and-language-therapy/>

If you have any feedback on this patient information leaflet, please email dgft.patient.information@nhs.net

This leaflet can be made available in large print, audio version and in other languages, please call 0800 073 0510.

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此宣传单可提供大字版本、音频版本和其它语言版本，请拨打电话：0800 073 0510。

Ulotka dostępna jest również w dużym druku, wersji audio lub w innym języku. W tym celu zadzwoń pod numer 0800 073 0510.

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Aceasta broșura poate fi pusă la dispoziție tipărită cu caractere mari, versiune audio sau în alte limbi, pentru acest lucru va rugăm sunați la 0800 073 0510.

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