

Greenwich Hospital

What is Aphasia?

PATIENT/FAMILY INFORMATION SHEET

What is aphasia?

Aphasia (uh-FAY-zhuh) is an acquired communication disorder that impairs a person's ability to speak and understand others, but does not affect intelligence. Most people with aphasia also experience difficulty with reading and writing. It is caused by damage to the language centers of the brain. The most common cause of aphasia is stroke, but it also can result from a head injury, brain tumor, or other neurological causes.

Are all cases of aphasia alike?

There are many types of aphasia. Some people may have difficulty speaking, while others may struggle to follow a conversation. The severity of aphasia varies from person to person depending upon the amount and location of damage to the brain. While specific symptoms can vary greatly, all people with aphasia have communication difficulties in common.

How is aphasia diagnosed?

If aphasia is suspected, a referral to a speech-language pathologist is suggested for a formal evaluation. A speech-language pathologist diagnoses aphasia through testing that includes language tasks such as following directions, answering questions, naming objects, and attempting to have conversations. It is the job of the speech-language pathologist to determine the amount of function available and to assess what treatments are the most appropriate for the individual.

How is aphasia treated?

Speech-language therapy is usually recommended if the patient demonstrates difficulty communicating. The most effective treatment begins early in the recovery process. The speech-language pathologist will help the individual to restore language as much as possible and to learn other ways to communicate.

How can family/caregivers help in the recovery process?

Family/caregiver involvement can aid greatly in the treatment and recovery process. The speech-language pathologist can help family members to learn the best way to communicate with the individual. The following key points are important:

- Give the person with aphasia time to speak and do not finish the person's sentences unless asked.
- Be sensitive to background noise and turn off competing sounds such as TVs or radios when possible.
- Be open to means of communicating other than speech (e.g. use of drawing or gestures).
- Confirm that you are understanding each other.
- Simplify sentence structure, and talk slowly and clearly.
- Maintain a natural conversation appropriate to the age of the individual.
- Include the individual in conversations and encourage communication.

Where can I get more information?

For more information regarding aphasia, ask to speak with your doctor, nurse or speech-language pathologist. You may also obtain additional information from:

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| • American Speech-Language-Hearing Association | (800) 638-8255 | www.asha.org |
| • National Aphasia Association | (800) 922-4622 | www.aphasia.org |
| • National Institute on Deafness and Other Communication Disorders | (800) 241-1044 | www.nidcd.nih.gov |
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Sources: American Speech-Language-Hearing Association @ www.asha.org Retrieved 9/05.

National Aphasia Association @ www.aphasia.org Retrieved 9/05.

National Institute on Deafness and Other Communication Disorders @ www.nidcd.nih.gov Retrieved 9/05.

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