ALS (Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis) can cause changes to your speech and voice. You may have slurred speech, a weak voice and trouble speaking loudly. Speech problems may get worse when you are tired or talk for a long time.

**Strategies to help**

As you become aware of changes in your breathing, voice and speech, you can work with a **speech language pathologist (SLP)** on strategies and aids that support communication.

These strategies may also help with speech problems:

- Swallow your saliva before speaking
- Take a breath before speaking
- Speak fewer words per breath
- Speak slowly
- Open your mouth wider and move your tongue more while speaking
- Face the person you are talking to
- Talk for shorter amounts of time
- Talk when you are less tired

**Communicate without talking**

Your SLP will teach you about **augmentative and alternative communication (AAC)**. AAC lets you share feelings, needs and ideas with others without talking or using our voice.

Everyone uses some AAC to communicate.

ACC is all forms of communication, other than talking out loud. This includes:

- Body language
- Hand gestures
- Facial expressions
- Written words
- Pictures
- Symbols

It is important to explore AAC when you begin to have changes to your speech. Talk with your SLP to decide if communication aids would help you.

**Communication aids**

Communication aids are tools to help you share your feelings, needs and ideas with others. When you are tired, or it is more difficult to talk, these aids help you to be understood.

**Types of communication aids:**

- **Alphabet and phrase boards** - you spell out messages or point to phrases already written
- **Picture boards** - you point to pictures or symbols to express your wants and needs
Communication Aids for People with ALS

- **Writing boards** - you write messages on a dry erase board
- **Portable amplifiers** - a device that makes your voice louder
- **Speech generating device (SGD)** - a device that produces speech output using pictures or alphabet keys to select and speak messages

You and your SLP may decide to use more than one communication aid to provide support. Tell your SLP how well the aid works to meet your needs. Your tools may change as your needs change with ALS.

**Message and Voice Banking**

If you think you may want a speech generating device (SGD), talk to your SLP about message and voice banking.

With **message banking**, you digitally record and save words, phrases, sentences, and sounds using your own natural voice. Your banked messages can convey your humor, emotion, and expression, which can be lost with synthesized speech tools. Your SLP can help you decide what messages to record and how to best organize and save your messages.

With **voice banking**, large amounts of your speech are recorded and uploaded into a special program. A synthesized voice is then created using your own speaking voice. Banked messages and voice recordings can later be uploaded into many speech generating devices currently on the market.

**Assistive Technology Services**

Our Assistive Technology Center can help you explore communication strategies and aids. Our goal is to help you communicate by finding the ways that work best for you. Talk with your doctor to get a referral. You can then make an appointment by calling 614-685-5600.

Talk to your doctor or health care team if you have any questions about your care.

For more health information, go to patienteducation.osumc.edu or contact the Library for Health Information at 614-293-3707 or health-info@osu.edu.

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