Communication Aids for People with ALS

ALS (Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis) can cause change to your speech and voice. You may have slurred speech, a weak voice and trouble speaking loudly. Speech problems may worsen 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, talk with your speech language pathologist (SLP). These strategies may also help with speech problems:

• Take a breath before speaking
• Swallow saliva before speaking
• Speak slowly
• Speak fewer words per breath
• Talk for shorter amounts of time
• Talk when you are less tired
• Face the person you are talking to
• Exaggerate mouth opening and tongue movements
• Spell words out loud if listener is not able to understand a specific word

Your SLP will teach you about augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) and aids that support communication.

About AAC
AAC includes all forms of communication, other than oral speech or talking.

Everyone uses AAC to communicate. AAC includes your body language, hand gestures and facial expressions. It includes using written text, pictures and symbols.

AAC helps us share our feelings, needs and ideas with others without talking or using our voice.

It is important to explore AAC when you begin to have changes to your speech. Talk with your SLP to decide if specific communication aids, tools or devices would be helpful. Our goal is to help you communicate and find strategies that work best for you.

Communication aids
Communication aids are physical tools to make your feelings, needs and ideas known to 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
• 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 needs may change as your needs change with ALS.

**Voice banking**

If you think that you may want a speech generating device (SGD), talk to your SLP about voice banking. With voice banking, you record and save messages in your natural voice while your speech is still easy to understand. The messages are saved in the SGD for you to use. Your speech therapist can help you decide what messages to record and how to best organize and save your messages.

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

The Library for Health Information is available to help you find more health information at (614) 293-3707 or e-mail: health-info@osu.edu.

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