Aphasia

Aphasia is caused by damage to the language areas of the brain. It is often due to a stroke, but may have other causes, such as a traumatic brain injury (TBI), tumor, or brain disorder. Aphasia can affect all forms of communication, including speaking, understanding, reading, and writing. Not all language areas may be affected the same way. For example, one person with aphasia may find it easier to read than talk, while another may find it easier to write than read. Aphasia can be temporary or permanent. Recovery often depends on how severe the damage is, the person’s age, and how well he or she does with rehabilitation.

Types of aphasia

Non-Fluent Aphasia

The most common problems of non-fluent aphasia range from finding the right word to being able to say that word. A person with non-fluent aphasia may sound hesitant while searching for the right word to say. It can be frustrating for the person affected because he or she usually understands better than he or she is able to express.

- The person may know what he or she wants to say, but is unable to say it. Attempts to find the right word may or may not be successful.
- The person may only be able to speak in single sounds, words, short phrases, or parts of sentences. Sometimes the person may not be able to talk at all.

Fluent Aphasia

A person with fluent aphasia does not have trouble saying words, but the words spoken may be nonsense or real words that are used incorrectly. The person with fluent aphasia may be unaware that his or her speech is not meaningful. This can lead to frustration and anger toward the listener for not understanding.

Other speech problems

Word or Sound Changes

There may be sound or word changes that:

- Have no meaning (“lat” instead of “bat”)
- Change the meaning (“mate” instead of “date”)
- Are unrelated to the word intended (“table” instead of “map”)
- Are closely related to the word intended (“ladle” instead of “spoon”)

You may also hear these problems called paraphasic errors.
Repetition/Perseveration

- This refers to repeated words, phrases, sentences, or ideas. The person may have trouble going from one thought to the next. When asked “what do you drive”, he or she may answer “car” and then continue to answer “car” to the next several questions.

Naming Problems

- A person may have problems naming common objects that he or she sees. The person usually knows what the object is and how it is used, but is not able to say the name of it.

Oral Apraxia

- A person cannot put sounds in the correct order to be able to say the word he or she wants. There is often face and neck tension, and facial grimacing in an attempt to speak.

Ways to help someone with aphasia

- Treat the person as an adult. Do not use “baby-talk,” talk louder than normal, or talk about the person as if he or she is not there.
- Use materials that are of interest and familiar to the person.
- Remove items that can get in the way of communication or are distracting. For example, turn off the TV when talking.
- Help the person to communicate clearly. Use a communication board that has pictures of objects. The person can point to what they need, or it can be used to connect thoughts and correct word choices.
- When giving directions, break long directions into short and simple parts. Allow extra time for the person to respond and do not be afraid of silence.
- Encourage him or her to write down what he or she wants to say, if able.
- Speak slowly, pause between words, and use simple phrases. Emphasize words that have the most important meaning.
- Only ask one question at a time. Asking only yes and no questions may be helpful.
- Provide sentences for the person to complete, such as “I want a drink of ______.”
- Provide word choices to help the person find the right word.
- If the person is able, ask him or her to describe the object to help find the right word. You may say, “If you can’t think of the name of the object, tell me something about it.”
- Do not pretend to understand when you do not! Confirm what has been said and tell the person at what point you stopped understanding.

Your loved one’s speech language pathologist (SLP) can give you additional activities and ideas. Remember that aphasia affects the person’s language, not intelligence.

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

For more health information, contact the Library for Health Information at 614-293-3707 or e-mail health-info@osu.edu.

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