Aphasia

The brain is divided into two sides called hemispheres. Each side controls different body functions. In most people, the left side of the brain controls language skills. Aphasia is damage to the language area from a stroke, traumatic brain injury (TBI) or tumor. 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.

Types of Aphasia

The two main types of aphasia are non-fluent aphasia and fluent aphasia.

Non-Fluent Aphasia

The most common problem of non-fluent aphasia is word choice. 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 their ideas.

- Attempts to find the right word may or may not be successful.
- The person may only be able to speak in single words, short phrases or parts of sentences. Sometimes the person may not be able to talk.

Fluent Aphasia

A person with fluent aphasia does not have trouble talking or think there is a problem with word choice. However, the words spoken may be nonsense or real words that are used incorrectly. The person with fluent aphasia may be unaware that speech is not meaningful. It may lead to frustration and anger toward the listener for not understanding what he or she wants to say.
Other Speech Pattern 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 the term “paraphasic errors” to identify these behaviors.

Repetition
This refers to repeated words, phrases, sentences or ideas. The person may have trouble going from one thought to the next. For example, when asked the question “What do you drive?” the person may answer “car” and then continue to answer “car” for the next several responses. You may also hear the term “perseveration” to explain this behavior.

Naming Problems
A person may have problems naming common objects that he/she sees. The person usually knows what the object is and how it is used, but is unable to say the name of it.

Echoing
The person may repeat or “echo” word-for-word what someone has said. It is also known as “echolalia”.

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/she is not there. Use materials that are of interest and familiar to the person.
- Remove items that can interfere with 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 show their needs 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.**
Speak slowly, pause between words and use simple phrases. Emphasize words that have the most important meaning.

Only ask one question at a time, to avoid confusion. 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, encourage description 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 speech language pathologist (SLP) can give you additional activities and tip ideas.

Talk to your doctor or others on your health care team if you have questions. You may request more written information from the Library for Health Information at (614) 293-3707 or email: health-info@osu.edu.