

# Aphasia

## Overview

Aphasia is an issue with language. It affects the ability to produce and/or understand speech as well as the ability to read or write. Aphasia happens because of damage to the brain, most commonly a stroke. Aphasia can range from mild to very severe. Mild aphasia may only affect one aspect of language, like remembering names of objects. Severe aphasia can make communication almost impossible. It is most common that multiple aspects of language are affected. There are several types of aphasia that are further explained below.

## Types of Aphasia

- **Global:** This is the most severe form. Persons with global aphasia will produce few recognizable words and understand little or no spoken language. They are unable to read or write.
- **Broca's:** Production of speech is limited to four words or less. Their speech sounds clumsy, and they have a limited vocabulary. They can understand speech well and are able to read but may have issues with writing.
- **Wernicke's:** Their ability to understand spoken word is impaired but they can produce speech. Although they may speak well, their speech often does not make sense with random words and phrases thrown together.
- **Mixed Non-Fluent:** Their speech resembles Broca's aphasia, but their comprehension of speech is limited. They are unable to read or write beyond elementary level.
- **Anomic:** They have issues with finding words they want to use in their speech as well as writing, usually nouns and verbs. They understand speech well and are usually able to read.
- **Primary Progressive:** A syndrome where language abilities slowly become impaired. This form of aphasia is commonly caused by Alzheimer's disease. The first symptoms are problems with language, and they progress to other issues such as memory loss.
- **Other:** There are many possible combinations of the issues listed that may not exactly fit into one of the above types.

## Recovery

Through speech-language therapy, it is a possibility that one may recover from aphasia. However, it does depend on the severity, type of aphasia, time since symptoms began, the patient's age and overall health, the type of injury, etc.

Recovery from aphasia can mean a lot of different things. A person with aphasia may never regain their full speech and language skills, but they can learn new ways to communicate. Speech-language therapy, nonverbal communication therapies (such as using a computer), and/or group therapy for the patient and their family are all methods for improving their ability to communicate.

## How to Help

Living with aphasia can be complicated and frustrating for the person with aphasia as well as their loved ones. Some suggestions for communicating with someone with aphasia include:

- Get the person's attention before starting to speak
- Reduce or get rid of background noise as possible (TV, radio, other people)
- Use simple, short sentences, but don't speak down to them
- Speak slowly and give the individual time to speak too
- Encourage all types of communication like speech, gestures, pointing, or drawing
- Give them plenty of time to express themselves; resist the urge to finish their sentences
- Use "yes" and "no" questions rather than open ended questions
- Do not exclude them from conversations
- Repeat key words or write them down to clarify meaning

\*Note. All information derived from the National Aphasia Association and Johns Hopkins Medicine.

**The Brain Injury Association of Virginia** provides personalized Information and Referral assistance to clients, their families, and technical assistance to professionals. For information on these services, contact the Brain Injury Association of Virginia.

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