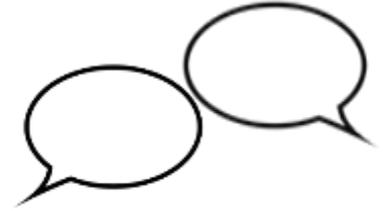


## Speech and Language Therapy – What is Aphasia?

### Introduction

This leaflet provides information to patients and their families about Aphasia.



### What is Aphasia?

Aphasia (*uh-fay-zha*), sometimes called *dysphasia*, is the loss of the ability to speak, or to understand what someone else is saying, or both. It is an impairment of communication which is caused when the language areas of the brain are damaged.

Aphasia affects different people in different ways. Someone with aphasia may have difficulty doing some or all of the following:

- Understanding what other people say
- Using the right words to express themselves
- Reading out loud or silently
- Writing or typing
- Drawing pictures
- Using numbers or doing calculations

Aphasia has nothing to do with intelligence. A person with aphasia is just as intelligent after the brain injury as before. They usually have coherent thoughts and meaningful ideas, but can have trouble getting the words out.

Aphasia also impacts relationships and identity. Not being able to say what you want can have a devastating impact on a person's confidence and participation in the world.

### What causes Aphasia?

Aphasia is usually caused by damage to the left hemisphere of the brain. This is the side of the brain responsible for language in all right-handed and most left-handed people.

Aphasia can be caused by damage as a result of:

- Stroke
- Head injury
- Brain tumour
- Neurological disease

## Different types of Aphasia

Aphasia varies in severity. Symptoms of language impairment can be grouped together depending on the relative strengths and weaknesses of a person's ability to speak, understand and repeat what they hear. However, it is important to remember that aphasia affects every patient differently.

### Fluent Aphasia

- Difficulty understanding what other people say
- Difficulty following directions and answering questions
- Speech is effortless, but full of errors
- Use of *jargon words* - words that are not real

### Non-fluent Aphasia

- Speech is difficult and effortful
- Relatively strong understanding skills
- It may be difficult to say "yes" and "no" as intended
- It may be difficult to repeat what someone else has said

### Global Aphasia

- Severe difficulty understanding and producing language
- Often able to say few words or phrases
- Often repeat the same word or phrase

## How can Speech and Language Therapy help?

Speech and language therapists identify and assess patients with aphasia. Therapy sessions aim to maximise understanding and expression of language and can include:

- Enabling patients to supplement spoken communication through use of *total communication strategies* (e.g. gesture, writing, drawing, key words).
- Use of *alternative augmented communication* (AAC) to communicate basic needs (e.g. picture charts, alphabet boards, using computers or tablet computers).
- Personalised therapy activities (e.g. practicing saying the names of family members, reading the newspaper, making a phone call).
- Targeted interventions for specific areas of impairment.
- Training patients and family members in the most effective ways to communicate with each other.