

Stroke survivors can have difficulty speaking

- ❖ After a stroke, many people have trouble speaking and understanding language. **This condition is known as Aphasia.**
- ❖ It can include difficulty finding correct words, speaking, writing, understanding what people say, what is written, and using numbers. Aphasia often hides people's thoughts, ideas, personality, intelligence and competence. People may experience loss in one or several of these areas. They are trapped by their language, but their thoughts and feelings are still there!
- ❖ For people with aphasia and those around them, communication can be very difficult. There can be feelings of anger, guilt, embarrassment, and frustration for all of the people involved. Life has changed for everyone. Aphasia can make it difficult to have a conversation about even the most regular, everyday topics.

BUT THERE IS HOPE!

- ❖ People are able to improve their communication skills over a period of time with effort and practice. When the brain is challenged to do something over and over, it learns new ways of doing things it used to do. The brain forms new pathways to go around the ones that were damaged. This is called Neuroplasticity. This usually takes considerable time and is hard work!
- ❖ While great improvement might be seen in the weeks and months immediately after the stroke, with steady effort and practice, improvement can continue for years. Rehabilitation professionals, especially speech therapists, are essential to a patient's language improvement in the initial stages, but they cannot do it all.

FAMILIES AND CAREGIVERS ARE CRITICAL IN HELPING STROKE SURVIVORS IMPROVE THEIR LANGUAGE.

- ❖ Improving language takes much repetition and practice.
- ❖ Sometimes, to ease the anxiety and frustration of blocked pathways, families and caregivers interrupt the new pathway formation by filling in words and not letting a stroke survivor practice.

Resources That Can Help

- A speech-language pathologist can provide valuable therapy to promote communication recovery.
- There may also be other resources in your community, like aphasia support groups and day programs, that help survivors work on their communication skills. See the COMPASS website at www.nccompass-study.org

Communication Matters

Caregiver Handout

Conversation DOs and DON'Ts

DO

- ✦ Be honest
- ✦ Encourage the person to use other means of communication (gestures, body language, facial expressions)
- ✦ Use humor
- ✦ Request clarification
- ✦ Be patient
- ✦ Give the person time to respond
- ✦ Speak slowly and precisely
- ✦ Use drawings, symbols and gestures
- ✦ Reduce distractions (TV, music, background noise, etc.) before trying to communicate
- ✦ Assure the person that you want to communicate successfully
- ✦ Respect when someone needs down time

DON'T

- ✦ Use childish language
- ✦ Shout (Aphasia does not affect hearing)
- ✦ Pretend that the problem does not exist
- ✦ Dismiss the person's desire to express thoughts
- ✦ Overload the person with too much information at once
- ✦ Pretend to understand if you do not
- ✦ Hurry or demand a speedy response
- ✦ Ask questions just to see if the person can respond

What people with aphasia say they experience:

- ✦ "Everyone's words are zooming past me."
- ✦ "Words are mixed up."
- ✦ "Talking requires so much effort that I often forget the intent of my sentence."
- ✦ "I am embarrassed when I cannot speak the way I used to."
- ✦ "Noise and other distractions make it hard for me to think."
- ✦ "Sometimes I am thinking of the right word, but the wrong one comes out."
- ✦ "I worry that people will think I am dumb because my speaking is so poor."
- ✦ "Give me time: often I will be able to get the right words. Don't interrupt my thinking."

2

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Suggested Activities

- ✦ **“REINFORCE LANGUAGE THROUGH EVERYDAY ACTIVITIES:** Use pictures to help when talking about people, meetings, appointments, schedules and events if the person does not understand language well. (Cell phones are great to assist with quick and easy pictures of people, places, objects, etc.) Writing key words can help to communicate ideas. Gradually increase length of words and phrases as the person begins to have better understanding of them.
- ✦ **REMINDERS AND ROUTINES:** Keep calendars, to do lists, and other reminders close at hand where the person can see them. Mark off days and check off lists as things are done. Many people may have trouble with reading or understanding numbers. Develop symbols to help convey understanding, if necessary.
- ✦ **GAMES:** If the person likes games, play ones that the person knows. Instead of playing individually, suggest playing in teams so the person doesn't have to feel the pressure of decision making or responding. Create cheat sheets to help with communication or to remember steps. Make simple card stands if the person is using only one hand. Be sensitive to the person's limitations with outside friends and family. Include them in the conversations, but don't spotlight them in ways that might be embarrassing or frustrating. Talk with them, not around them.

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