

## Guide to communication difficulties that can occur after a stroke or brain injury

### Other formats

If you need this information in another format such as audio CD, Braille, large print, high contrast, British Sign Language or translated into another language, please telephone the PALS desk on 01271 314090.

No two people's communication difficulties are ever the same. The conditions mentioned below can often all occur on their own, or at the same time.

### Aphasia (sometimes called dysphasia)

We have a language centre on the left side of our brain. If it is damaged by a stroke or brain injury, then our ability to process language can be affected. It makes it difficult to understand what people say, to speak sounds and find words. Sometimes reading and writing can be affected, as well as the ability to recognise and use numbers.

Aphasia on its own doesn't change intelligence, but in the early days there can be difficulties with memory. Most people with aphasia will improve, but the bigger the area of damage in the brain, the more likely they will have language difficulties for a long time. Learning to live with aphasia is challenging for the person with aphasia and their communication partner.

### Dysarthria

If any of the nerves that supply the muscles for speaking are damaged, then speech can be slurred and difficult to understand. This is called dysarthria. It's similar to when you have an injection at the dentist and your speech sounds funny. Sometimes the problem is mild and sometimes it is severe. It can also cause drooling. Being tired can make it worse.

### Apraxia (sometimes called dyspraxia)

This is a condition that nearly always occurs with aphasia. People with speech apraxia struggle to plan, organise and sequence their movements for speech, however their muscles won't be weak.

### What can help

Please do speak with a speech and language therapist. They are often involved with assessing swallowing problems to begin with, but they are also experts in communication difficulties and can answer any questions you may have.

The top tips recommended below have been shown to make communication a bit easier, but some of them may not seem particularly natural. Again, a discussion with the speech and language therapist may be helpful.

## Top tips

1. Try to use short, simple phrases to help your partner understand.
2. Using gesture can really help people to understand. If that is difficult or doesn't work, it can help to write down a key word. This will feel odd and unnatural, but have a go if you need to.
3. Sometimes people mix up yes and no. This can be very frustrating. You may have to rely more on their facial expression, or maybe ask the questions again to check they've understood and you've understood their response.
4. Allow time – lots of time.
5. If the person speaking can't find the word but look to you for help, then say the word if you know it. This can really help keep the conversation going.
6. Keeping your partner involved and participating in general conversation is known to be helpful. Sometimes people bring in photos (with names of people), picture books, tablet devices and anything you can think of to encourage conversation and chatting.

Having a communication difficulty is not easy. It is known to cause depression in some people. Please let us know if you are worried that your partner is feeling depressed or if you are feeling anxious and concerned about the future.

## Further information

Please contact our speech and language therapy service for advice and support. They can be contacted on 01271 322388. Or ask the ward staff to point them out to you; they wear white tunics and purple trousers.

To contact the local **Stroke Association** Support Coordinator:

**Telephone** 01392 447 362

**Website** [www.stroke.org.uk](http://www.stroke.org.uk)

**Address** Stroke Association, Forde House, Harrier Way, Exeter, EX2 7HU

**Textphone** 18001 0303 3033 100

### Other useful websites:

[www.stroke.org.uk](http://www.stroke.org.uk)

[www.headway.org.uk](http://www.headway.org.uk)

<https://aphasiatavistocktrust.org>

[www.aphasia.org](http://www.aphasia.org)

<https://aphasiaalliance.org>

## **PALS**

The Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) ensures that the NHS listens to patients, relatives, carers and friends, answers questions and resolves concerns as quickly as possible. If you have a query or concern call 01271 314090 or email [ndht.pals@nhs.net](mailto:ndht.pals@nhs.net). You can also visit the PALS and Information Centre in person at North Devon District Hospital, Barnstaple.

## **Have your say**

Northern Devon Healthcare NHS Trust aims to provide high quality services. However, please tell us when something could be improved. If you have a comment or compliment about a service or treatment, please raise your comments with a member of staff or the PALS team in the first instance.

'Care Opinion' comments forms are on all wards or online at [www.careopinion.org.uk](http://www.careopinion.org.uk).

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